GUITARS, CARS, WATCHES, WINE & THE DELUXE LIFE

GUITAR AFICIONADO

MAGAZINE

BRITISH AMPS
SECRETS OF 60s and 70s SOUNDS

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PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

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A COMEDIAN'S COOL COLLECTION

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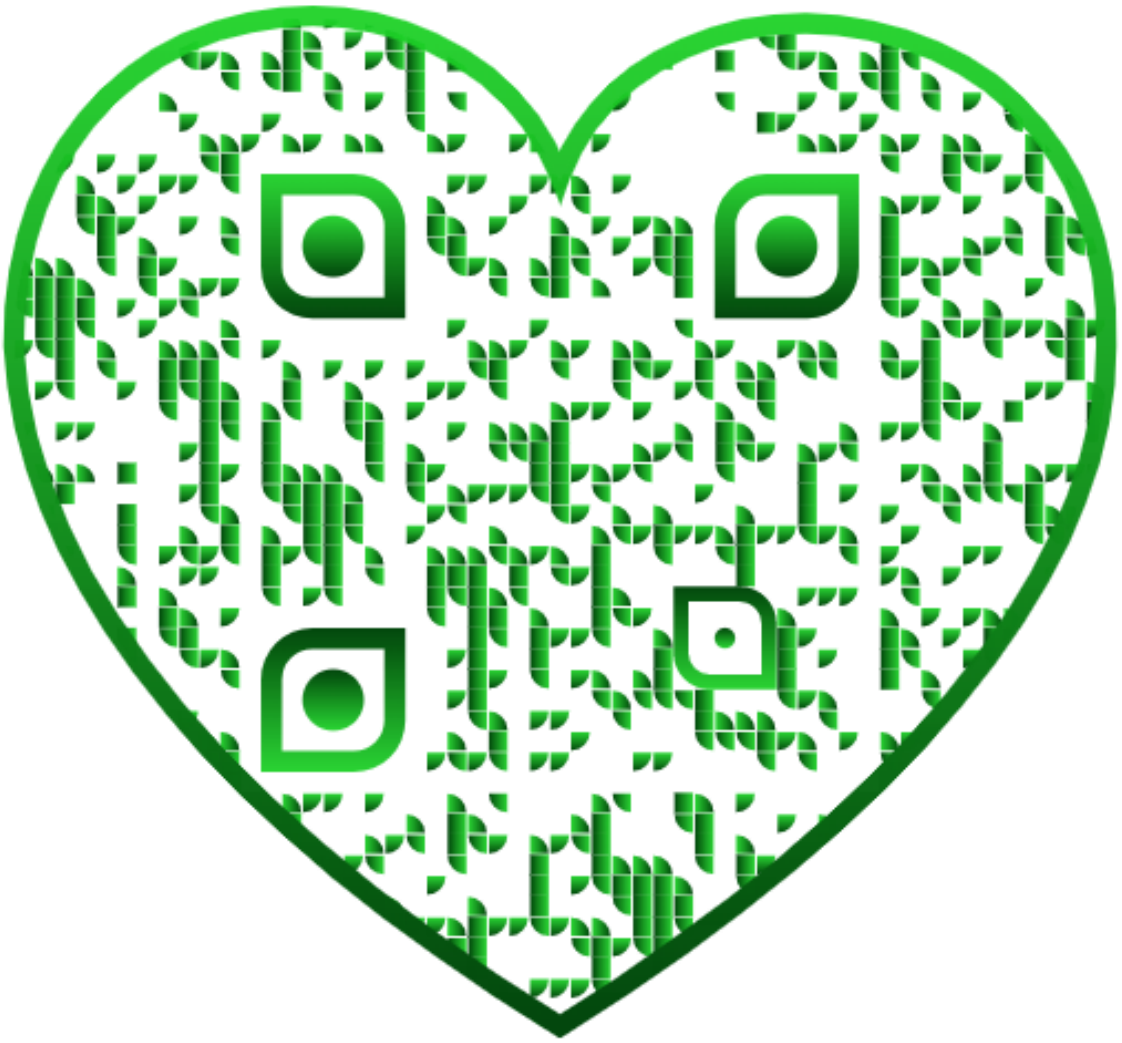

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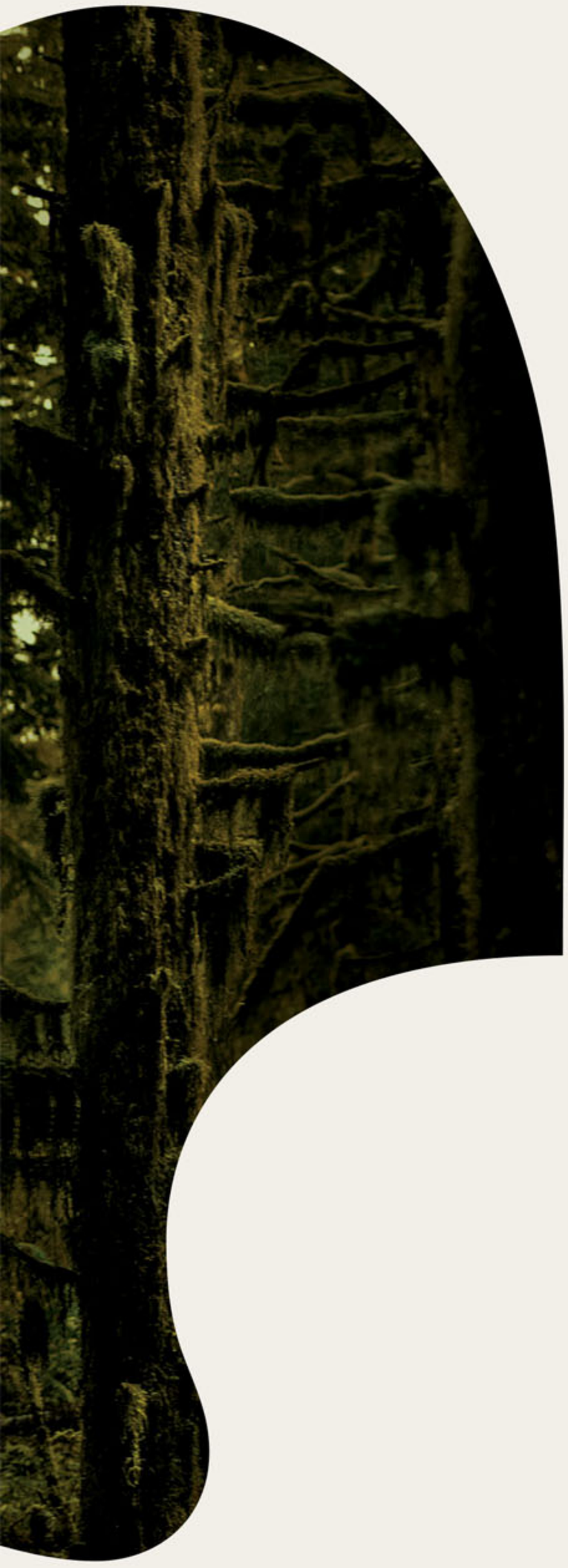

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Marc Maron

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LETTER *from the* EDITOR

I HAVE COLLECTED guitar gear for at least 40 years. Thanks to my obsession with unraveling the mysteries behind iconic guitar sounds of the entire recorded music era, I sometimes feel like I've turned over every stone when it comes to gear. Whether attending guitar shows or perusing dealer listings and online auctions, I increasingly had a feeling of "been there, played that" and wondered if I had indeed seen it all.

That attitude changed in a big way when I was interviewing Eddie Van Halen about his guitar collection for this magazine about four years ago. While I was helping Matt Bruck, who has worked with Ed for the past 26 years, dig through Ed's storage, Matt took me over to a section of the space devoted to his own personal collection of British amps. I noticed stacks of rare Marshall and Vox amps and speaker cabinets, most of which I had only seen photos of. But what really blew me away was the sheer variety of amps from British companies whose products rarely, if ever, made the journey to stores and players across the pond. I reveled at the sight of almost every model of Watkins, WEM, and Selmer amp known to mankind as well as obscure amps I'd never heard of before, like Music City and Impact.

I asked Matt if he'd be interested in sharing his collection with *Guitar Aficionado* readers. He agreed, but due to his commitments with Van Halen and the EVH brand, it took four years for us to schedule the shoot. It took Matt and me four days to compile the final selection, set it up, and tear it back down. Of course, I couldn't resist spending a full day plugging into the amps and putting them through their paces with a select assortment of guitars. Many of the tones I heard were surprisingly familiar (and previously frustratingly elusive), particularly the furious growl of tiny combos that delivered harmonically complex distortion and chime-like clean tones rivaling the most coveted Marshall and Vox amps, but with their own singular personalities.

While these pages consistently celebrate the beauty and sex appeal of guitars (with good reason), we haven't always given amps as much credit as they're due. Some may look like utilitarian boxes (with inner beauty coming from their stellar tones), but I'm certain that most guitarists will find it difficult to resist the charm of many of the British combos featured in this issue as well as the macho stature of the massive stacks. As cool as these amps look, they sound even cooler. I highly recommend seeking them out to witness a truly revelatory sonic experience.

CHRIS GILL
Editor-in-Chief

GUITAR AFICIONADO

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TK SMITH SMITH SPECIAL

{ BY DAMIAN FANELLI }

ALTHOUGH IT'S JUST a two-hour drive from Los Angeles, the sleepy, high-desert California town of Yucca Valley might as well be a world away. In fact, you could say *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* away, since the town provided some of the striking, open-desert scenery in Stanley Kramer's classic 1963 comedy. Sadly, a lot of the wide-open spaces in the film have been replaced by Walmarts, Starbucks, and Taco Bells, but Yucca Valley, which borders Joshua Tree National Park, is still slow paced and friendly enough to remind visitors of a simpler time.

In many ways, it's the perfect setting for TK Smith Electronic Guitar Service. That's where lifelong Californian TK Smith produces—entirely by hand—his beautiful midcentury-modern Paul Bigsby–inspired Smith Special. It's a guitar that would have looked right at home in the hands of Grady Martin or Merle Travis.

"I'm such a Paul Bigsby nut," Smith says, referring to the pedal-steel and solidbody pioneer of the Forties and Fifties who's best remembered for the vibratos that bear his name. "In the Eighties, I played in a Western swing band called the Radio Ranch Straight Shooters. Our steel-guitar player, Chas Smith, owned a Bigsby pedal steel, so he turned me on to Bigsby's guitars. Before that, I only knew about the vibratos."

Smith has always been inspired by past masters. As the lead guitarist for Big Sandy & His Fly-Rite Trio in the early Nineties, he was a major player in LA's rockabilly revival. "During my senior year of high school, a guy made me a cassette," Smith says. "One side was Stray Cats; the other was all 1956 Gene Vincent stuff with Cliff Gallup on guitar. That's when I knew I wanted to play like that." Smith's stellar fretwork can be heard on two seminal Fly-Rite Trio albums, 1990's *Fly Right with Big Sandy & the Fly-Rite Trio* and 1992's *On the Go*.

After leaving the Fly-Rite Trio in 1992, Smith worked in a fabrication shop for Walt Disney Imagineering. In the early 2000s, he moved to Yucca Valley and began making custom cabinets and furniture. He's been following his dream—building guitars—for the past four years.

Except for the pots and Waverly tuners, Smith builds the Smith Special completely from scratch, from the Bigsby-inspired C.A.R. (Cast Aluminum Replica) pickups to

"I WANT MY GUITARS TO LOOK LIKE THEY COULD'VE COME OUT OF THE FORTIES."

the lacquered Bakelite pickguards. To top it all off, he uses an impressive collection of antique tools, including a Valley buffer from the Twenties, Craftsman drill presses from the Forties and Fifties, and a Delta band saw from the late Forties.

"I want my guitars to look like they could've come out of the Forties," Smith says. "That's how I play guitar. I like to sound like I stepped out of that time period, and I want my guitars to look like that. I could make guitars a lot faster and probably lower my price if I went to CNC [*Computer Numeric Control*] machinery on a lot of stuff, but this is what I enjoy doing."

The Smith Special has neck-through construction, a chambered body, and weighs around eight pounds. The neck is curly maple with a walnut strip, and the chambered maple body has a top and back made of bird's-eye maple laminate. Although the Bigsby influence is obvious, Smith has incorporated his own touches, including a distinctive 3+3 headstock, his namesake vibrato, and a custom vibrato arm that brings the pivot point closer to the player's hand, allowing for easy access and finer adjustments.

Smith tries to build a Smith Special every six weeks or so. One of his more memorable builds was for Rounder Records retro rocker JD McPherson, who once said, "TK is to guitar building what Masamune was to Samurai swords."

"JD wanted a Smith Special with a Bo Diddley body instead of the double cutaway," Smith says. "I wasn't sure if I wanted to do it because I thought it'd be funky, but it came out really cool."

While the Smith Special is available for order online, Smith often sells his creations through New York City's TR Crandall Guitars. His long-term goal is to work with a handful of shops in the U.S. that can represent his work with the proper attention to his unique approach. Another goal is to design a bolt-on neck version of the Smith Special. "The idea behind it is to be able to offer my hardware, pickups, and sound on a guitar that will appeal to a wider audience," Smith says.

In addition to the C.A.R. pickups that grace his Smith Specials, Smith makes a vintage-styled CCII pickup that's popular with Tele players. He also sells a matching Tele bridge pickup that's built to his specs by Curtis Novak.

To hear Smith's latest "Charlie Christian in a cowboy hat" fretwork, check out Charlie Thompson's 2015 album, *The Foothill Sessions*.

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{ ANNOTATIONS BY SCOTT HICKEY }

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SPIRIT OF JAPAN

SHOCHU MAKES A SPLASH IN ITS JAPANESE HOMELAND AND ABROAD

{ BY CHRIS GILL }

FOR PROBABLY AS long as alcohol consumption records have been kept, Sake has ranked as the most popular indigenous alcoholic beverage in Japan. That status changed however in 2003, when Shochu became the most popular drink, and since then the two have battled for the top spot. This change was brought about by a younger generation of drinkers who ignored the "working class" and "old man" image that Shochu had in Japan and were drawn to its bolder flavors, greater variety, and more potent alcoholic kick.

Whereas Sake is brewed from rice, Shochu is distilled from any number of ingredients, including barley (mugi), sweet potato (imo), rice (kome), buckwheat (soba), brown sugar (kokuto), or various other ingredients, like sesame and chestnut. More than 600 distilleries in Japan make Shochu. Single-distilled Shochu—often identified as Honkaku Shochu—generally has a higher percentage of alcohol (typically between 20 to 30 percent) than multiple-distilled (Korui) Shochu, and much bolder and more distinctive flavors. Shochu can be enjoyed straight up, although most Japanese prefer to dilute it with hot or cold water, serve it with ice, or mix it with citrus juice or oolong tea.

Nikaido Kitchomu comes in a traditional ceramic bottle and is made from 100 percent barley. It has a smooth, clean mouthfeel and delicate grain flavors that make it a perfect intro to Shochu. Kuro Kirishima comes from Japan's Miyazaki prefecture and is distilled from a blend of sweet potato (83 percent) and rice (17 percent). It has a musky, sweet personality and pairs exceptionally well with rich Miyazaki Wagyu beef. Beni Otome, which is 60 percent wheat, 30 percent rice, and 10 percent sesame, has the bold, nutty flavor of roasted sesame seeds, which makes it a great companion for sushi or yakitori.

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BEST OF THE BEST

THE MUSCARELLA BROTHERS REVIVE A KITCHEN CLASSIC WITH THE FIELD SKILLET.

{ BY MICHAEL COLAMECO }

IN THE WORLD of Kickstarter crowd-funding success stories, few rival that of the Brooklyn based start-up Field Company (fieldcompany.com). Two brothers, Stephen and Chris Muscarella, had a rather simple idea: Take an American classic—the cast-iron pan—and give it a 21st century makeover.

Part of the journey had the Muscarella brothers flying to Krakow, Poland, a few years ago. Here they met with cast-iron expert Marcin Gornoy, whose treatise *Thermophysical Properties of Thin Walled Compacted Graphite Iron Castings* was part of their inspiration. After two years worth of research and trial and error, the Muscarellas produced their first batch. Their final design is made from 75 to 90 percent recycled U.S.A. iron, forged into lighter, thinner, smoother molds, resulting in a pan that weighs less than a 13-inch MacBook Pro (4 1/2 pounds). After developing the product to their satisfaction, last March the Muscarellas announced their plans to offer the Field Skillet on Kickstarter. In less than a month, the Field Company raised an amazing $1,633,362 via 12,553 backers.

I've been a huge fan of cast-iron skillets since I was a kid. My grandma had a few, and as soon as I graduated from the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) and moved to Manhattan, I started collecting them. They are the best workhorse all-purpose pans ever invented, and they do many things really well. The heat retention is excellent, they are great frying tools, they provide a nonstick surface that's ideal for cooking eggs, they give a steak a great sear, and you can even bake in them.

Back in the day, I'd often find cast-iron pans in thrift stores and antique shops in New York City and upstate for around five bucks. I'd look for older American brands like Griswold from Pennsylvania, Wagner Ware made in Ohio, or Volrath from Sheboygan, Wisconsin. I generally looked for pans that had been used a lot and had really smooth polished cooking surfaces. A little rust was no problem, as I could grind that out and re-season the pan.

To this day, in my Cape May kitchen I have well over a half-dozen cast-iron pans, from my giant fried-chicken pan down to a really small one that's good for cooking a single Roesti potato or a couple of eggs. I also keep a grill pan with raised ridges (for making grill marks) and an eight-inch cast-iron utility pan in my New York City apartment, where they get loads of use. Without exaggeration, I use these pans at least twice a week, at minimum.

Priced at $90, the Field Skillet isn't cheap, but it will last you a lifetime. I found them a pleasure to cook with from the very beginning. Aside from being lighter, the pans also have an ergonomically designed handle and are delivered out of the box with a polished, smooth, and 100 percent seasoned cooking surface that insures that each pan will work perfectly on your first try, as well as every time you use it after that. The first few runs of the new Field pans have already sold out, but if you get in line now for the next run, it will be well worth the wait.

New York City–based chef and media personality Michael Colameco is the author of *Mike Colameco's Food Lover's Guide to NYC* and hosts *Colameco's Food Show* on PBS and the nationally syndicated radio program *Weekend Food*.

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ELECTRIC DAWN

GAGE BREWER'S 1932 RO-PAT-IN ELECTRIC SPANISH PROTOTYPE

THE FIRST DOCUMENTED, public electric guitar performance took place at the Shadowland Pavilion in Wichita, Kansas on Halloween night, 1932. The performer was guitarist Gage Kelso Brewer, and his instrument was the 1932 RO-PAT-IN electric Spanish prototype seen here, along with another RO-PAT-IN prototype, the legendary A-25 Frying Pan. While Brewer's A-25 was lost in a 1935 fire, his electric Spanish model has survived down through the years and is now on exhibit at the Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum. It is the centerpiece of the museum's current exhibition, *The Electric Guitar—Wichita's Instrument!*

A professional guitarist working coast-to-coast in the early decades of the 20th century, Brewer befriended George Beauchamp, founder of the RO-PAT-IN company, which would become Rickenbacker, and inventor of the electro-magnetic horseshoe pickup that made possible the electric guitar as we know it today. Brewer purchased the A-25 and ES prototypes in the summer of 1932 and brought them back to Wichita, where he unveiled them with a great deal of showmanship and panache, touting the instruments in a press release as "a new invention which is startling the music world."

"The Spanish electric guitar that Brewer brought to Wichita," museum director Eric Cale explains, "was the prototype that led to the half dozen or so production-model Spanish guitars made later that year from wooded bodies similar to National's Trojan model, built by the Harmony Company of Chicago. Brewer's guitar features a tenor-sized body and a 24-fret neck with 17 frets clear of the body. The top is one inch thick, indicating that the acoustic qualities of the guitar itself were not a consideration in its design. No volume control is present on the guitar. Cable connection on Brewer's guitar was by two phone tips rather than a quarter-inch jack. Phone tip connections and the absence of volume controls are features found on a very few of the earliest production guitars."

The guitar is on an extended loan to the Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum, and the museum is currently in negotiation with the instrument's owners to acquire it for the permanent collection. —*Alan di Perna*

WICHITA-SEDGWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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PET SCAN

A NEW MULTI-DISC EDITION OF *PET SOUNDS* GOES DEEPER THAN EVER INTO BRIAN WILSON'S POP MASTERPIECE.

Pet Sounds
50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition
The Beach Boys
Capitol ($67.98, 4 CD/1 Blu-ray Audio)

IN DECEMBER 1965, Brian Wilson was one year into his withdrawal from performing publicly with the Beach Boys. After suffering a nervous breakdown at the end of 1964, he'd begun smoking pot to calm his nerves and was astounded by the effect it had on his musical perception. Now devoted to the recording studio, he had become a prolific writer and producer of songs for the group and amassed hours of experimental and unreleased tracks. What he needed was a goal to help him focus his abundant energy for a new project.

He got it that month when the Beatles released their sixth album, *Rubber Soul*. Wilson was awestruck by the quality of the songwriting and the absence of so much as a single filler track. In a burst of inspiration, he told his wife he was going to go the Beatles one better by creating "the greatest rock album ever made!" The result was *Pet Sounds*, and the album's multitude of fans would say Wilson succeeded in his goal, and then some. Whether or not you agree, it's fair to say *Pet Sounds* was the launch pad for pop culture's grandiose musical awakening.

Working with the famed Wrecking Crew session musicians, Wilson crafted arrangements that moved fluidly from pop to orchestral and many genres in between. Among the album's highlights are the teen-pop hymn "God Only Knows," the buoyant mini-symphony "Wouldn't It Be Nice," and "Caroline, No," the haunting closer Wilson had originally selected as his solo recording debut following his departure from live performance. Fittingly, Paul McCartney was among the most notable *Pet Sounds* disciples. He was floored by Wilson's use of any and every instrument required to realize his musical vision, an approach that would subsequently influence the Beatles' own masterpiece, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Pet Sounds was a Number 10 hit in the U.S., but it topped the charts in England, where it remains an influential and much-loved classic among British musicians of all generations. Fans will get a chance to hear the album with new ears courtesy of this 50th anniversary four-CD/1-Blu-ray audio deluxe edition. The set features the remastered original album in stereo and mono, along with a new high-resolution instrumental mix, session outtakes, alternate mixes, previously unreleased live recordings, and high-resolution stereo and mono and 5.1 surround mixes. Wilson's pet sounds never sounded better. —*Christopher Scapelliti*

DVD

RUST NEVER SLEEPS
Reprise ($13.99, 103 minutes)
Culled almost entirely from live shows at San Francisco's Boarding House in 1978, the album *Rust Never Sleeps* was Neil Young and Crazy Horse's attempt to battle musical complacency while taking a more theatrical approach to stage performance. The full-length concert documentary that accompanied the album's release in 1979 was filmed on October 22, 1978, at San Francisco's Cow Palace. Long out of print, the film returns in a new release that's been restored from the original film negative and given a high-resolution stereo and 5.1 surround sound mix. At long last, these legendary performances, which include "Cinnamon Girl," "Like a Hurricane," and "Hey, Hey, My, My (Into the Black)," come through with the clarity they deserve.

ALBUM

BLUES OF DESPERATION
Joe Bonamassa
J& R Adventures ($11.98)
Now 38, Joe Bonamassa has been making records for 15 years and established himself as one of today's foremost electric blues guitarists. For his latest release, he threw out the rulebook that defined his previous albums. That meant eschewing Marshalls for Fender tweeds and putting away his effect pedals. Heading to Nashville, where he'd tracked his previous release, *Different Shades of Blue*, he enlisted Music City's top session players for an album he calls his "evolution as a blues-rock musician." With *Blues of Desperation*, Bonamassa pushes himself out of his comfort zone, drawing upon his years of experience to create his own unique place in the raw emotions of the blues.

BRIAN WILSON: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES

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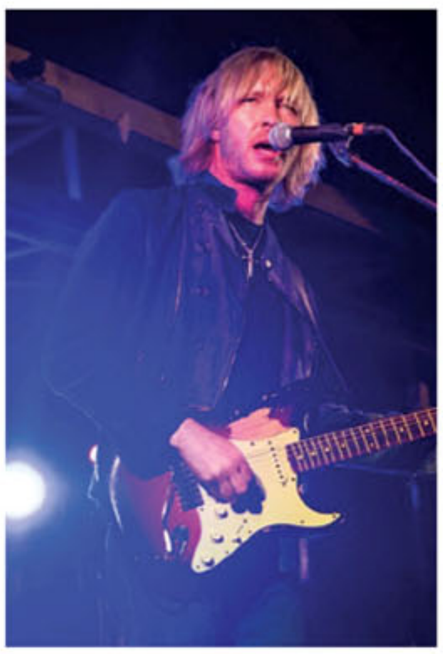
BEACH PARTY

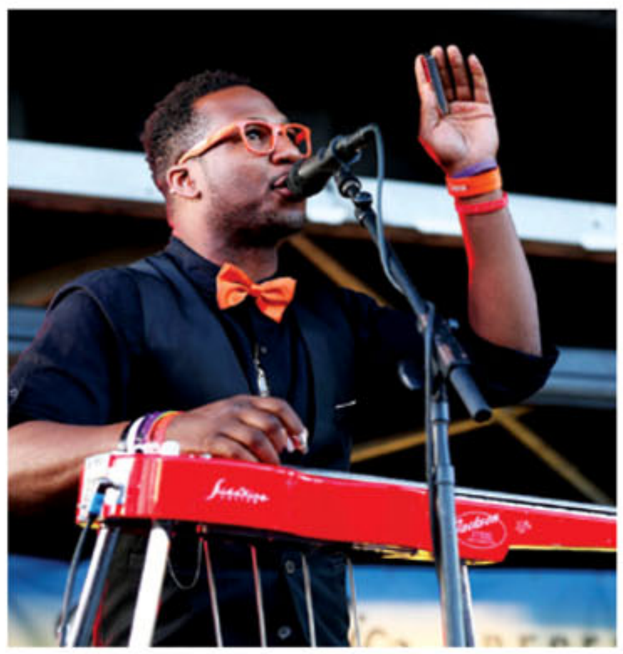
GUITAR LEGENDS COME TOGETHER AT THE 2ND ANNUAL MALIBU GUITAR FESTIVAL

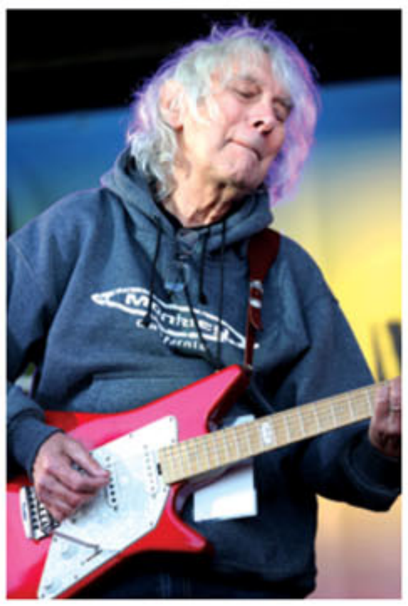
THE 2ND ANNUAL Malibu Guitar Festival took place from April 28 through May 1 in downtown Malibu, California, and *Guitar Aficionado* was there to take in the fun. Presented by D'Angelico Guitars, the festival featured an all-star lineup that included Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Robert Randolph, Albert Lee, Richie Sambora, Orianthi, Eddie Money, Zepparella, and former Cars guitarist Elliot Easton with his band the Empty Hearts.

The festival was founded by Doug DeLuca, co-executive producer for *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, and John Watkin, co-owner of the Emmy Award–winning Planet Grande Pictures production company, to bring a high-level music-and-entertainment experience to the seaside town. In addition to drawing top-level musical entertainment, the festival supported local musicians and raised funds for charity. This year's event raised $110,000 for Mending Kids, Boys & Girls Club of Malibu, and THERAsurf. The Malibu Guitar Festival was recently awarded with a *Malibu Times* "Dolphin Award" in recognition of its service, commitment, and contribution to Malibu.

"The iconography of the guitar and the backdrop of Malibu are a perfect combination for this beautiful event inspired by a passion for music and a love of community," DeLuca says. "The artists and supporters that have come together will insure the event's success and growth well into the future."







(top) Alejandra Armas DeLuca–festival co-founder and Sponsors, Benefit and Charity Director–with four signed guitars auctioned at the event on behalf of charities; (second row) Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Robert Randolph, Orianthi; (bottom row) Albert Lee, and Zepparella

DELUCA: LISA SPEAR; SHEPHERD, ORIANTHI: DAWLIN PHOTOGRAPHY; RANDOLPH, LEE, ZEPPARELLA: MELANIE ESCOMBE PHOTOGRAPHY

DREADNOUGHT DEBUT

MARTIN GUITAR PREMIERE THEIR *BALLAD OF THE DREADNOUGHT* DOCUMENTARY.

ON MAY 4, Martin hosted a special screening of the documentary *Ballad of the Dreadnought—A Musical Icon Turns 100* at New York City's TriBeCa Screening Room. Martin Guitar produced the 38-minute film to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first Dreadnought guitar, which C.F. Martin & Co. built in 1916 for Charles H. Ditson & Company. The film, which is narrated by actor and Martin enthusiast Jeff Daniels, covers the entire history of this beloved, iconic, and best-selling guitar design, from the various styles of music it helped inspire to the many guitarists who made history playing Dreadnoughts. The film also features commentary from historians and interviews with artists, like Roseanne Cash, David Crosby, Vince Gill, Steve Miller, Sturgill Simpson, Stephen Stills, Jason Isbell, Seth Avett and many others.

At the reception prior to the screening, guests were entertained by Martin Artist Craig Thatcher, and Martin chairman and CEO Chris Martin IV presented a Martin Dreadnought Junior to Jeffrey Patch, who won the *Guitar Aficionado/Guitar World* giveaway. Attendees also got a glimpse at the D-222 100th Anniversary model. Before the screening, Chris Martin gave a brief introduction to the film, where he discussed his grandfather's obsession with the *H.M.S. Dreadnought* battleship and how it inspired the name of Martin's biggest model.

Ballad of the Dreadnought has won six awards and distinctions from various film festivals, where it was screened earlier this year. Martin released the film to the public on May 5 via Vimeo. It can be viewed at vimeopro.com/user48581009/the-ballad-of-the-dreadnought.

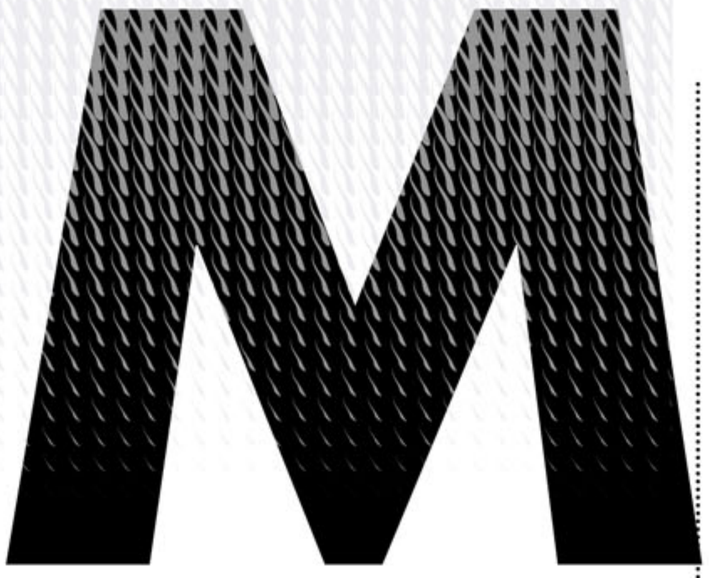
CHRIS GILL

STRUNG OUT

While his fictional persona may have hit the skids, in real life **MARC MARON** is enjoying his greatest success ever.

Story by **JOE BOSSO** • Photography by **TRAVIS SHINN**

Gibson



MARC MARON'S FUNKY ONE-ROOM OFFICE is situated on the second floor of a nondescript building in the Highland Park section of Los Angeles. From here, he listens to CDs and vinyl, chills out on the guitar, sorts through mail and gifts from fans, and oversees a jam-packed schedule that includes comedy club appearances, an IFC series now in its fourth season, and, of course, his mega-popular podcast series, *WTF with Marc Maron*.

Seated behind a cluttered table-top desk, Maron pops a nicotine lozenge and admits that there was no straight-line plan leading to his late-bloomer success. "After my last gig went down, I didn't know what to do," he says, referring to *Breakroom Live*, the last in a series of radio and webcast shows he co-hosted for Air America in New York during 2004 to 2009.

"They kept pulling the plug on me and bringing me back. But when *Breakroom* got canceled, I started to think, 'Now what?' Before radio, my career was mostly in stand-up comedy. So what was I looking at? A long life of being a relatively unknown headliner trying to get by? That was terrifying to me. I knew I had to do something."

With one month left on his Air America contract, Maron and a co-worker, Brendan McDonald, started recording a secret series of podcasts in the *Breakroom Live* studio. Their operation was guerilla style all the way, hustling guests past nighttime security guards and into the freight elevator. "We didn't know we could make money with it," he says. "I just knew that I liked the medium. I liked those mics, and I needed to talk to people. That's all there was to it."

After taping a dozen episodes, Maron returned to the Highland Park house he had purchased in 2004, where he and McDonald converted the garage into a recording studio. In the fall of 2009, Maron officially debuted *WTF* (internet slang for "What The Fuck?"), and the twice-weekly podcast quickly developed a cult following. The size and scope of the audience grew steadily, and after the airings of two revelatory interviews with Robin Williams and Louis C.K, his ratings soared. By the end of 2013, *WTF* hit its 100 millionth download. "You just don't think about that kind of success going into something like this," Maron says. "At least I didn't. I was just trying to survive and move forward."

Guests who have visited Maron's small, unassuming garage studio (affectionately nicknamed the Cat Ranch for his devotion to feline friends) include an impressive variety of famous names, mostly from the world of pop culture, but in 2015 President Barack Obama dropped by for a candid hour-long chat that made headlines across the globe. "I'm still pinching myself," Maron says, shaking his head. "The president actually came to my garage. We had Secret Service guys all over the block. It was crazy." He pauses, then adds, "You can't plan that. I mean, who could? You just do what you do."

Music stars of every stripe have made the pilgrimage to the Cat Ranch—everyone from Thom Yorke and Chris Cornell to James Taylor and Keith Richards. For Maron, one of the highlights of such visits is the occasional impromptu performance.

"To see musicians lock into their art is fascinating," he marvels. "Seeing Lucinda Williams singing and playing in front of me was amazing. Aimee Mann was incredible; J. Mascis on an old Gibson acoustic; Billy Gibbons on an old cigar-box guitar. There's been so many. Nick Lowe was great. I'm sitting there trying not to cry or be too excited, because I really think that music is magic."

On rare occasions Maron picks up one of his guitars—he's partial to his black 1986 Fender Strat and a brand-new Gibson tobacco sunburst ES-335—and jams along with his guests. "That kind of situation doesn't always present itself," he stresses. "I kind of walk the line between being a kindred spirit and a fan. Dave Alvin let me jam with him, and I kept up pretty well. That was exciting. I have fun, but I make no claims to being on their level. I'm just an amateur."

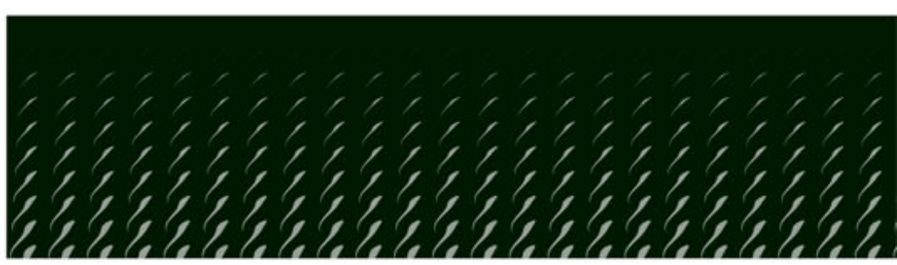
Maron's house is but a three-minute drive up the hill from his office. He gets out of his car, heads down a short walkway to the detached garage, and opens the door. Amid an explosion of CDs, books, photos, and posters, there's yet another cluttered tabletop desk, this one with a couple of mics and a six-channel analog mixer plugged into a laptop. Maron keeps a small collection of amps in the garage—a 1965 Fender Champ, a 1963 Vibroverb reissue, and an original mid-Fifties wide panel tweed Deluxe. "What was it somebody once said about the Deluxe?" he asks rhetorically. "'It's a one-trick pony, but it's a good trick.'"

"Oh, and check this out," he says, pointing to an old Bell & Howell movie projector. He opens its storage compartment door to reveal that most of its projector guts have been torn out and it's now a guitar amp. "Blake Mills came over and did the podcast, and he turned me on to his amp guy, Austen Hooks. Austen's a wizard, and he makes these amazing amps out of old movie projectors. He gave me that one, and it's cool as hell. He uses the projector's amplifier section and rebuilds it into a guitar amp. You can really dirty it up and get a range of sounds. It's incredible."

Growing up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Maron took to the guitar at the age of 11, starting lessons with his younger brother Craig on a hollowbody Harmony that belonged to their father. "Our mom found us this guitar teacher, Brad Bumgarner-Kirby, this heavy-set Christian hippie," he recalls. "After a while, my brother flaked on the guitar, but I stayed with it. Brad had a lot of blues records, and he turned me on to Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. Then I became obsessed with 'JoÚny B. Goode' by Chuck Berry. Brad showed me how to play it. The first lead I learned was the boogie bass line to that song. I thought it was astounding."

By his early teens, Maron moved up to a Les Paul goldtop copy and a Marshall half-stack ("I was into equipment, but I didn't know what to

"The guitar is **MY WAY OF MEDITATING.**"



OPENING PAGES: Maron at his Highland Park home with his Gibson 1957 Les Paul TV reissue.

FACING PAGE: Playing his Gibson J-45.

pair with that; it was all wasted on me"), but he calls the cream-colored 1978 Telecaster that he got at age 15 his first "really good guitar." "It had a heavy-ass body, but it was just like Keith Richards' guitar, so that was cool," he says. "Then I got a big fucking Fender Twin Reverb that had the pop-up gain knob on it [*a push-pull Master Volume control that activated a gain boost circuit found on Seventies silverface models*]. I wish I still had that thing."

An embarrassing vocal performance at camp put Maron off singing, so he enlisted his friend Eric Tittman to be the occasional frontman for a band that he formed with his pals Dave Bishop, Dean Hines, and Damion Hogland. "We didn't really play out because we weren't diligent about learning songs," he says. "We did a version of 'Rock Steady' by Bad Company, 'Takin' Care of Business,' Skynyrd's 'Needle and the Spoon,' a bad version of 'Sweet Emotion,' and a really bad version of 'Tush' by ZZ Top. We lacked the discipline you need to take it seriously."

A series of guitars came and went during the years that Maron traversed the country developing his comedy chops. There were a couple of Telecasters, along with a Frankenstein model that was built from a Schecter Explorer-style body and Tele neck. "They put in a coil-tapping switch, which I didn't understand," he says with a laugh. "Truthfully, it was too good a guitar for me, so I took it apart." His 1986 Strat, purchased with one of the departed Teles in a two-for-one Fender sale, remains in his collection. "I really appreciated Robert Cray's tone. The honesty of the Fender sound and that five-position switch on a Strat was very compelling to me."

As Maron heads into his modest, two-bedroom house, he stops in the living room, where his current lineup of guitars is spread out. The Strat is there, and so are a blonde American Standard Telecaster and a semi-hollow Nash T-69TL Tele Thinline-style model. They rest near a parlor-sized Kay "music note" stencil K1160 acoustic from the early Sixties. Next to a pair of Gibson acoustics—a 1966 FJN and a brand-new J-45—is a reissue of a 1957 Les Paul Junior with TV Yellow finish that he purchased in 2002. "I didn't play that a lot at first because it's really a rock guitar," he notes. "But I pulled it out last night and thought, 'Why don't I play this more?'"

Thanks to Gibson (via an introduction from his pal Brendon Small of *Metalocalypse* fame),

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Maron in the Cat Ranch, his converted garage studio; the Austen Hooks movie projector amp; (left) Kay K1160 "music note" stencil acoustic; (right) new Gibson J-45; Maron on mid-Fifties wide panel Fender Deluxe with Les Paul TV reissue, 1966 Gibson FJN, 1986 Fender Stratocaster, and Nash T-69TL.

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Maron also acquired his 335 and a black Les Paul Custom. "The 335 has a thick, meaty neck, so I had to relearn how to play on that one," he says. As for the Les Paul, he allows for a certain nostalgia factor: "My buddy Dave, who's passed, played one of these. I never had a Les Paul before this one. I always thought it was too good of a guitar for me, and it still is. The tone is amazing, and the feel... You can really move around on it."

Most of Maron's playing these days is limited to jamming along to records, though he says that, time permitting, he'd like to corral some musician friends into doing something more formal. His schedule has loosened just a tad now that the fourth season of his TV series *Maron* has begun airing. Portraying a fictionalized version of himself on the show allows him to explore various personal and professional aspects of his life in a "what if?" fashion. As the new season begins, Maron's character has bottomed out spectacularly: Back on drugs after 16 years of sobriety, he's blown his podcasting career, bungled a chance at a TV talk show, lost his house and his car (and yes, his cats), and is reduced to living in a storage locker.

"The character is something of a cautionary tale," Maron says. "He's on a road that, thank God, I didn't find myself, where I'd found some success and then destroyed my life because of drugs. But it happens, and it's a possibility for anybody who is a recovering person. I don't want to do it in my real life, but I said, 'Let's do the worst thing that could happen in my fictional life.' It's all within the realms of possibility. It's not a stretch.

"The momentum of this season doesn't become about career," he continues. "It becomes about 'How do I live a full life? What do I want out of life?' That's a different question, and I'm coming at that in my real life, too, but not from a place where I've lost everything. Those are the questions that are answered in the new season. It's all worth exploring."

Prior to his own series, Maron's acting experience was limited to a small role as an "angry promoter" in Cameron Crowe's 2000 film, *Almost Famous*. Now that he's flexed his acting chops on TV, he says he's considering other opportunities. He recently turned in a guest stint on Joe Swanberg's upcoming Netflix series, *Easy*. "I'd like to do a little more of that and find out where I'm at," he says. "We'll see what happens."

He assesses his guitar playing similarly. "I've got certain muscles, but I need to stretch them," he notes. He picks up his 335 and peels off a fluid blues run. Nodding to himself, he says, "I could probably use some lessons. You hit a wall sometimes. For me, the guitar is an outlet. I don't meditate, but I play guitar. Even if I just do it for 10 minutes a day, the guitar is my way of meditating." GA

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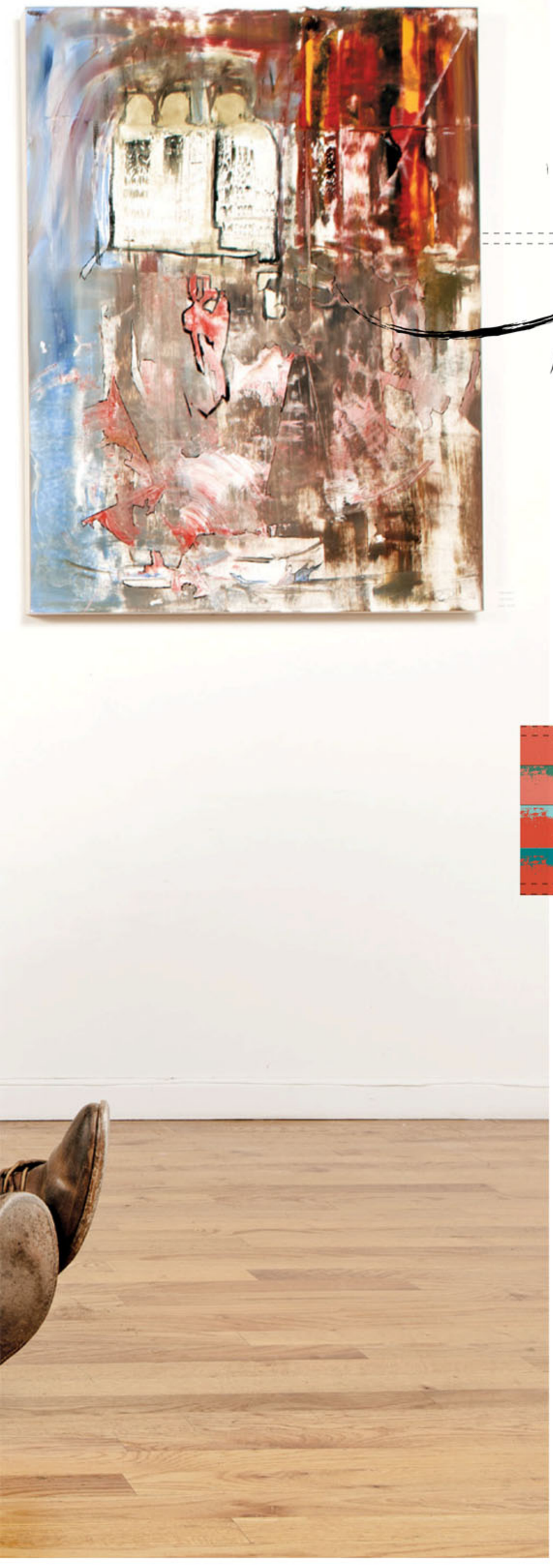

LONESOME crowe

BY *Joe Bosso* • PHOTOS BY *Justin Borucki*

GUITAR AFICIONADO • PAGE 37

AFTER THE BLACK CROWES OFFICIALLY BROKE UP LAST YEAR, **RICH ROBINSON** FOUND NEW WINGS AS A SOLO PERFORMER AND PAINTER.

Rich Robinson is no stranger to opening nights. But on most of those occasions, roughly half of his 45 years, in fact, he's stood onstage, under a sea of sweltering lights, guitar in hand, performing the music of the Black Crowes, the raunchy rock and roll band he cofounded with his older brother Chris. Lately, however, Robinson has faced an altogether different, quieter kind of first-night scrutiny as his work as a visual artist has gone on display at galleries throughout the United States.

"There are some similarities between painting and music, but there are really big differences, too," Robinson says. The guitarist is seated on a couch in the early afternoon inside New York City's Morrison Hotel Gallery, where later that evening two dozen of his paintings—mostly oil-on-board abstracts, grand bursts of color, tangled lines, and surreal textures—will meet the eyes of urban hipsters, curious rock fans, and various members of the art illuminati. "Painting is very personal and solitary," he says. "It's just you and the canvas, whereas most of the time with music, it tends to be group effort.

"But to me, whether it's music or painting, they're both forms of creation, and I get a lot of joy from both," he elaborates. "I realize that, because I'm a musician, people might want to see my stuff. And it's been interesting seeing all the reactions. After a while, I think the whole celebrity aspect goes away, and people just start appreciating the art for what it is. Which is great. You make these creations, and you don't want to keep them in your basement."

Robinson's interest in art goes back to his teens, when he became enamored with the work of Italian Renaissance painter Giotto di Bondone, renowned for his vibrant, naturalistic

"You make these creations, AND YOU DON'T WANT TO KEEP THEM IN YOUR BASEMENT."

➤ *left*
Robinson with his Zemaitis prototype acoustic.

➤ *above*
Reds

religious images. "I thought those pieces were so beautiful," he enthuses. "I loved the contrast of the colors and how vibrant the halos are. The golds and blues just moved me so much."

But it wasn't until the early Nineties that the guitarist gave any thought—and summoned up the nerve—to trying his own hand at painting. Robinson credits the Black Crowes' original bassist, Johnny Colt, with inching him toward a canvas. At the conclusion of a two-year tour supporting the band's smash debut album, *Shake Your Money Maker*, the Crowes went home for the Christmas holidays and exchanged gifts. Knowing that Colt had an appreciation for photography, Robinson bought him a medium-format camera. In turn, Colt gifted Robinson with an easel, canvases, and a collection of paints.

"That was so cool of him," Robinson says. "I had everything to work with right there." Even so, it would be another year until he picked up a brush. "I think I was a little intimidated," he admits. "I had such an appreciation for art, but I just didn't know if I had something to say. Finally, I just said, 'Well, okay, I'll just try.'"

Fearing that he would "disrespect the canvas," Robinson's first attempt at painting was on paper. Pleased and relieved at the results, he moved on to an actual canvas. Seeing images merge in a way that excited him, he tried another one, and then another. "The first paintings were a little more conceptual. I was trying to go for something," he asserts. "The more I did it, the less structured I tried to be. I always like to be surprised by my own work. I found the whole process to be so peaceful, so I kept going."

During tours, Robinson occupied himself on planes, the tour bus, and in hotel rooms by drawing with ink, charcoal, or pencil, but whenever he got off the road, he would return to his basement and his oil paints (he tried acrylic for a brief time, but he found the colors weren't as rich and malleable as oil). "Painting became such a peaceful outlet for me," he notes. "All the band stuff got so intense—the success and drugs, the bullshit and fights, and bullshit about bullshit. It felt so nice to retreat to a different world and enjoy something that was all mine. It was whatever I wanted it to be. The whole thing could just unfold."

He surveys the walls, taking in his work with a grand, panoramic sweep of his hand. "I just like looking at them," he says, letting out a contented sigh. He gets up and walks over to a painting called *Reds*, a remarkable *trompe l'oeil* collision of layered images that at first glance suggests people, but in the blink of an eye one also sees burning candles. "That wasn't the plan, but if it's the effect you get, that's great," he says with a laugh. "It can be whatever you want it to be."

Next, Robinson crosses the room and stops at a striking, almost 3-D piece called, appropriately, *Layers*. Unlike the other works on display, it's painted on a canvas, and it also stands out for being broadly conceptual. "Boards and canvases hold the paint differently," he theorizes. "A canvas allows you to add layers more easily because of the way the paint collects." Gesturing to the lines of the main, vaguely peanut-like image, he says, "You can see the amount of paint that's laid on here. It is a whole different vibe. I love the process of layering and then seeing where that takes me. You create contrasts of color but you do it on top of textures. It's almost like music, I guess."

The business of music will occupy most of Robinson's 2016. In just a few weeks, he'll hit the road as a guest guitarist with Bad Company, filling in for Mick Ralphs, who announced that he wasn't up for the travel involved with touring. "I'm really excited to play with the band," Robinson says. "I met Paul Rodgers at an awards show last year, and he said that he really liked the way I played guitar. At first Paul's manager talked to me about opening for the band, and then it switched to

50

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"I ALWAYS LIKE TO BE *surprised* *by my own work.*"

me playing with them. That'll be great. Paul's one of the best singers ever, and I love [*drummer*] Simon Kirke. I can't wait."

After finishing with Bad Company, Robinson will then tour on his own, performing songs from his first four solo efforts (*Paper*, *Llama Blues*, *Through a Crooked Sun*, and *Woodstock Sessions*) that he's reissuing in expanded, reimagined forms, along with a healthy dose of cuts from his newest album, *Flux*. "The agenda for the new album was to not have one, not unlike painting," he points out. "When you make a record, there's almost a path you start to go down where you say, 'There's some cool shit happening,' and then you sink into this level where you're unsure. Then something will shift and it's almost like catching a wave. When that happens, it's like it carries you, and you just go with it."

For *Flux*, Robinson relied on number of custom electric guitars from Teye (an El Dorado and La Mora), James Trussart (a SteelTop), Echopark ("They made me this really cool non-reverse Firebird-style guitar they call a Ghetto Bird"), and Scala, along with an original 1969 Ampeg Dan Armstrong Lucite model outfitted with a Tom Holmes pickup. For acoustics, he used a 1953 Martin D-28, a Sixties Guild 12-string, and a prototype that the Zemaitis company commissioned Lowden Guitars to build. Robinson estimates that he currently owns about 30 guitars, but that's less than half the number of instruments he owned before Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast in 2012. The monster storm wiped out almost all of his guitars that were stored in a warehouse in Weehawken, New Jersey, along with master tapes and gear belonging to the Black Crowes.

"The place was completely flooded," he says. "Only a few things were able to be saved or restored, like my '63 Gibson ES-335 and my '68 Les Paul goldtop. Everything else—my mics, my sitar, even our tapes with Jimmy Page at the Greek—it was all gone."

Oddly enough, Robinson calls the aftermath of the storm "cathartic," viewing it as a sign for him to ultimately walk away from the Crowes. (After numerous near-breakups, lineup changes, hiatuses, and reunions, the band announced that it was finally calling it quits in 2015.) "Don't get me wrong—I love the Crowes," he says emphatically. "I love the work we did and what we accomplished, but a lot of it's negative. There was so much uncool behavior in that band, and after a while I was sick of taking the abuse. So, in a way, losing all the guitars and stuff allowed me to say goodbye to that negativity. I could let go and move on."

He scans the room once more, adding with a slight smile, "It's a cliché, I know, but 'All things for a reason.' I really do believe that." GA

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TONE OF TONE

TO DEVELOP A SIGNATURE SOUND, **MATT BRUCK** *ASSEMBLED AN AMAZING AND EXHAUSTIVE COLLECTION OF LESSER-KNOWN* **BRITISH AMPS** *FROM THE FIFTIES, SIXTIES, AND SEVENTIES.* **By Chris Gill | Photos by Kevin Scanlon**

"I THOUGHT I HAD IT ALL COVERED," Matt Bruck says as he relaxes on a couch in a large room that's essentially a highly fortified security bunker in North Hollywood, California, surrounded by dozens of vintage British amps. "Before I started this collection, I had a '68 Marshall Super Lead and a '66 JTM45 with a Marshall JCM800 cabinet loaded with Celestion G12M 25's. It was the mid Nineties, and I was playing in bands in clubs chasing a record deal. I prided myself on having a stellar tone, but I also wanted a unique sound. I wanted an enviable tone that no one else could replicate, at least in terms of the gear. As great as my two Plexis sounded, lots of other guitarists were using them too."

Bruck wasn't the average musician on the Hollywood club circuit during the Nineties. In 1988, he started working for Andy Brauer Studio Rentals. "I was a staff tech there," he says. "We did session setup and cartage for the biggest session players, and Andy had an unparalleled collection of vintage guitars and amps that he rented to producers and bands making records in L.A. I drove a truck around Los Angeles all day carting and setting up guitar rigs for sessions in recording studios for guys like Steve Lukather and Dean Parks in between picking up or preparing rentals for upcoming recording sessions for everyone from Guns N' Roses to Michael Jackson."

In 1990 Bruck started working as a tech for Eddie Van Halen, and for the past decade he has played an important collaborative role in the development of the EVH brand of products, including the acclaimed, best-selling 5150 III series amps. Obviously, Bruck's ear for guitar tone is developed to master's degree level.

Bruck's obsession with British amps began in the mid Nineties. "I stumbled across a one-paragraph article in a guitar magazine about Sound City amps," he recalls. "I remembered seeing Sound City cabinets onstage with Rick Nielsen and Cheap Trick, but I never knew much about them. I was immediately fascinated by their history. That night I found a classified ad placed by a guy in San Diego who was selling a Sound City cabinet, and the next morning I was driving 140 miles to go get it. It was an all-birch, rear-loaded cabinet with 50-watt cast-frame Fanes. When I got it home and put it up against my Marshall cabinet, I was stunned! Not only did the Sound City cab sound better, it sounded unique."

That discovery caused Bruck to wonder what else was out there that he might not have known about. Soon he chased down another Sound City speaker cabinet for sale, which led to another revelation. "The seller also had this little 1961 Watkins Clubman combo, which I had never seen before," he recalls. "I tried it, and was blown away. I couldn't believe that such a little amp could sound so damn good! I realized that there was this whole world that I didn't know about, so I started chasing down as much British gear as I could find and educating myself about it."

Over the past two decades, Bruck has amassed one of the most formidable collections of British amps known to exist. While his collection includes numerous prime examples of highly desirable classics and rarities from Marshall and Vox, its most impressive distinction is the multitude of brands and models that are rarely mentioned in the mainstream, let alone known about by most guitarists, young or old.

"No one over here [*in the U.S.*] seemed to know anything about vintage British amps if they weren't a Vox or Marshall," Bruck says. "Information wasn't easy to get, so I had to go to a lot of effort to learn whatever I could. It became a passion unto itself. I discovered Selmer amps, Watkins, WEM, Laney, Simms-Watts, VamPower, Jennings, Music City, and Dallas. One of the most illuminating parts was that there were all these speaker companies that I never knew about before. I knew all the mainstream names—Celestion, Jensen, and so on—but when I discovered Goodmans, Fanes, ELACs, and other British brands, I discovered a whole new voice. Then I learned about magnet composition and cones, and how the frames are made. I discovered the difference between stamped frames versus cast frames and how all this translates to sound.

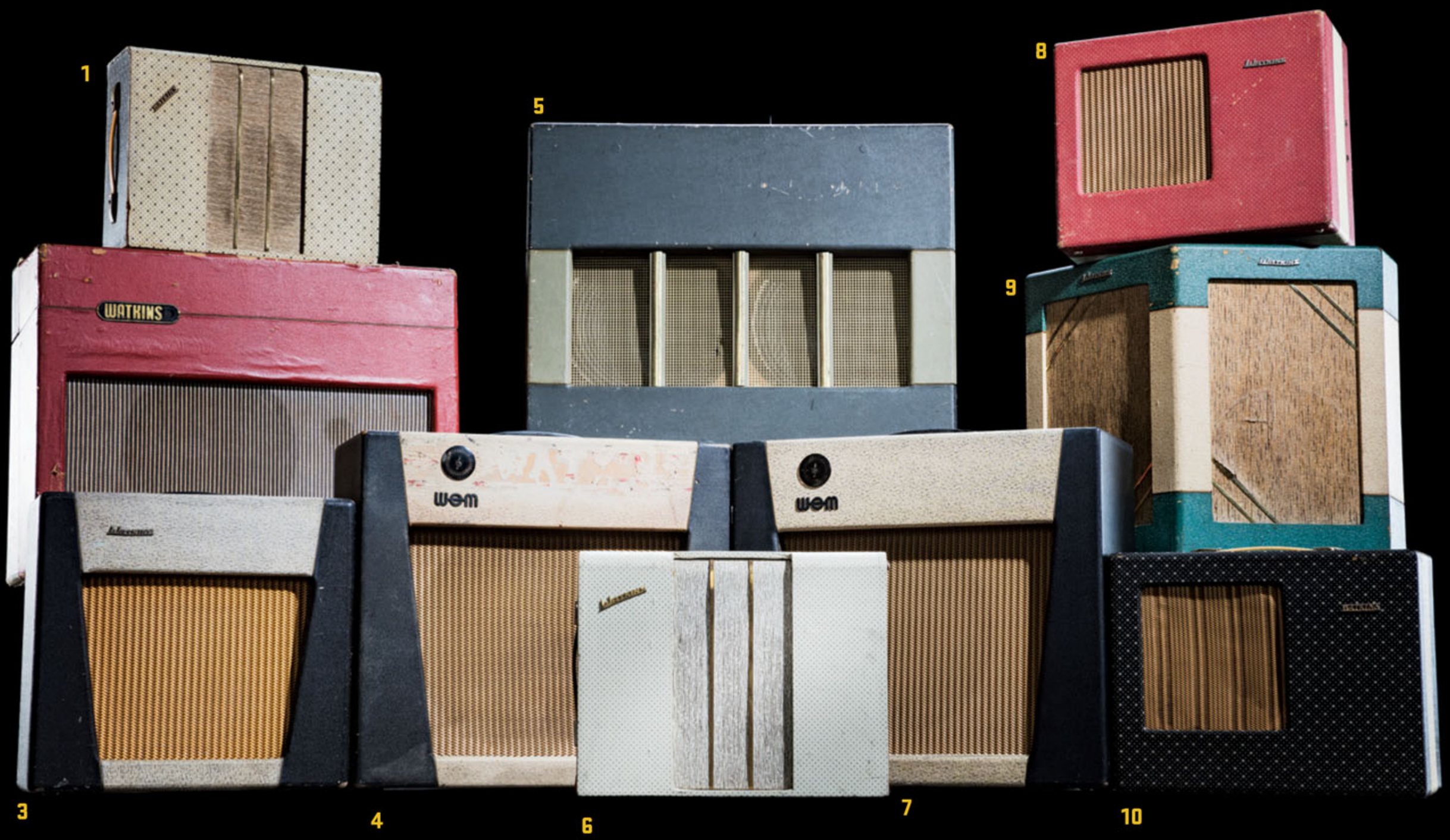
"When I started noticing how each brand and each model has a unique tonal signature," he continues, "I couldn't break down the details of guitar amplification far enough. It went from learning about the tubes and the brands of tubes to the transformers and capacitors and what effect different circuits and components had on tone."

Bruck started collecting well before the days of eBay and Google searches. "It was still the days of dial-up Internet!" he says with a laugh. "I had to establish human networks to find these things. I remember hunting down my first Watkins Joker. From what I know, Watkins probably made a hundred of them around 1960, and I was hell-bent on finding one. Somehow I found a shop in England that was selling one. I called the number, and the guy who answered was very nice. He told me to come down to the shop to check it out if I was interested, and I told him that would be difficult as I was in California. He couldn't fathom how I found him halfway around the world. The concept of 'global' gear sales was unheard of to most back then."

As Bruck plugs various guitars—a 1955 Les Paul Junior, an early Seventies Strat, a Les Paul, and an ES-335—into tiny combos and powerful heads from the Sixties and Seventies, it quickly becomes evident that many of these lesser-known amps were the source of some of the most-coveted tones heard on British rock records during those eras. And Bruck is using those amps to supply a distinctive sonic stamp to records being made today. "A couple of years back, I had a rental partnership with Dave Friedman for about five years or so. A lot of these amps were used to make a lot of records.

"Amps are half of the equation of your sound," Bruck emphasizes. "Most players obsess over guitars, but they don't pay nearly as much attention to the amp. They'll collect 50 guitars but have, like, two amps. There's nothing wrong with that, but to me amps and even speaker cabinets are like guitars. No two sound exactly alike. You can radically change the character of your sound by changing the amp and cabinet. The amp is quintessential—it's the voicing of your playing. It's a huge part of the overall sound. Maybe it's because most people think guitars are sexier, but to me great amps are just as sexy.

"At the moment I'm in the process of profiling and modeling everything in the collection," he concludes. "It represents an enormous amount of my life's work, passion, and pursuit. My goal is to immortalize it all in a library of plug-ins for all guitar players to access, enjoy, and be inspired by for the rest of eternity. Most of it was here before I was, and I'd like it to be here for future generations long after I'm gone."



1 Westminster combo with eight-inch ELAC speaker
2 Joker combo with one Goodmans Audiom 12-inch Special Design, built-in Copicat tape echo, fewer than 100 made
3 Scout combo with 10-inch ELAC speaker
4 Warrior Bass combo with Goodmans Audiom 81 15-inch speaker
5 Monitor combo with two Goodmans Audiom 60 12-inch speakers, very rare—one of two known to exist
6 Clubman combo with Celestion 10-inch speaker
7 Chieftain combo with Goodmans Audiom 12-inch speaker, one of only five made
8 Clubman combo with ELAC eight-inch speaker
9 Dominator combo with two ELAC 10-inch speakers
10 Westminster combo with ELAC eight-inch speaker

Watkins

"Watkins played a bigger role in the sound of British rock than most people are aware. It's rumored that Marshall introduced their now infamous 18-watt combo because at the time Watkins was kicking Marshall's ass with the Dominator when it came to sales and Marshall had no competitive offering. The guitar amps that Bill Purkis designed for Charlie Watkins all sound incredible, but apparently Charlie was more interested in designing P.A. systems. Plugging into a V-front Dominator combo with two 10-inch ELAC speakers can be a religious experience."

"Watkins became WEM because Charlie Watkins thought he needed a three-letter name to compete with Vox. WEM amps are underappreciated, although David Gilmour has used a WEM 4x12 for years and Noel Gallagher gigs and records with WEM amps a lot."

WEM

1 Dominator 50-watt head
2 2x12 Starfinder speaker cabinet with Goodmans Power Range red-label speakers
3 Dominator combo with 12-inch Celestion gray-back 20-watt speaker
4 1x12 extension cabinet with 12-inch ELAC
5 Control ER15 head
6 Monitor Reverb 50-watt head
7 4x12 Starfinder Super 80 speaker cabinet with ELAC speakers
8 Westminster combo with 12-inch ELAC speaker
9 Custom 15 combo with 10-inch ELAC speaker
10 Dominator MK1 combo with 12-inch ELAC speaker
11 Control HR30 head
12 Pick-A-Back extension cabinet with Fane 12-inch cast-frame model 122-12

1 LC.16 solid-state 1x12 combo with 40-watt Fane 122-10
2 Supergroup top-mount 50 head
3 Supergroup 100 head
4 Supergroup 4x12 with Goodmans Audiom 61 speakers
5 60-watt pre-Supergroup head with blue logo, marked "palb11770w"
6 Slant Supergroup 4x12 with Celestion G12-25 M speakers
7 LC.50 2x12 combo with two Celestion G12-25 M speakers

Laney

"Some people consider Laney the poor-man's Marshall, but they were really unique amps made in Birmingham that don't sound like anything else. The transformers supply massive amounts of plate voltage, just like the old, classic Marshalls did, and the cabinets were loaded with Goodmans or Celestions. Tony Iommi invented heavy metal playing his Gibson SG through Laney Supergroup amps, and there are many photos of him playing onstage with walls of Laney amps behind him."

- 100-watt Treble and Bass heads, 4x12 cabinet on left has cast-frame Fane 50-watt 122-14 speakers, 4x12 cabinet on right has Goodmans red-label Power Range speakers

Music City

"Music City amps were a house brand for a chain of music stores that were made by Laney. If you look at the front panel, you can recognize a similarity between the Music City amps and the Laney Supergroup."

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1958 Gibson Korina Flying V ex John Entwistle THE WHO

1955 Gretsch G6130 Round Up Knotty Pine

1964 Burns Hank Marvin

1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom 'Time Capsule'

1965 Matamp Series 2000 Head

1959 Two-Tone Vox AC15 TV Front

1966 Park 45 Head SUPER RARE!

1966 Marshall 4x10 Bluesbreaker Combo

1977 Orange Overdrive head

1967 Marshall JTM50 'Black Flag' Head

1949 Fender Dual Professional V Front

1974 Hiwatt DR103 Ex Pink Floyd

1959 Vox AC30 TV Front

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3 Zodiac Tremolo Fifty MK II head
4 2x12 cabinet with Celestion G12M speakers

1 Futurama Corvette combo with eight-inch ELAC speaker
2 Truvoice Concord Eight combo with ELAC 12-inch speaker
3 Futurama Caravelle combo with Goodmans 12-inch speaker
4 Truvoice Treble-N-Bass Fifty head
5 2x12 Truvoice cabinet with pre-Rola Celestion T1134 Thames Dittons
6 Futurama Bassist Major combo with Goodmans 12-inch speaker
7 Truvoice Mercury 5 combo with Richard Allan 10-inch speaker

Selmer

"A lot of British artists used Selmer amps. Everybody knows about the Vox amps that the Beatles used, but their Selmer amps were also important. George Harrison is playing through a Selmer Truvoice in early photos of the band, and Paul McCartney used a Selmer Thunderbird Twin to record guitar parts for *Sgt. Pepper's*.

"There are several distinct eras of Selmer amps—red and cream, gray and blue, crocodile-skin, and so on. The circuits are unique, and the amps sound great. The tone is very different from a Marshall or Vox."

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"I got hip to Simms-Watts once I got a moderate education in British amps. I found out that Mick Ronson played through a Simms-Watts on David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust* tour. They have Partridge transformers, and the cabs are loaded with cast-frame Fanes and built from 14-ply Baltic birch. The circuit is also unique. It looks so cool with its enormous orange Plexi face panel."

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4 AC40 combo with two Celestion G12 Silver Alnico 12-inch speakers
5 2x12 extension cab with two Celestion G12 Silver Alnico 12-inch speakers

"Tom Jennings, who was the founder of JMI/Vox, left JMI in 1967 a few years after Thomas Organ bought the company and started his own company called Jennings Electronic Industries [*JEI*]. Dick Denney, who designed the AC15 and AC30, also joined him, and they made improved versions of the Vox amps. The components and build quality are as good as it gets. I would put my AC40 up against any JMI-era AC30. It's the ultimate refinement of the AC30, yet so few of them were made, unfortunately. I gigged a lot with my AC40 all over Hollywood and guys would come up to me after and ask 'What the hell is that thing and where can I get one?'"

Jennings

1

2

3

4

5

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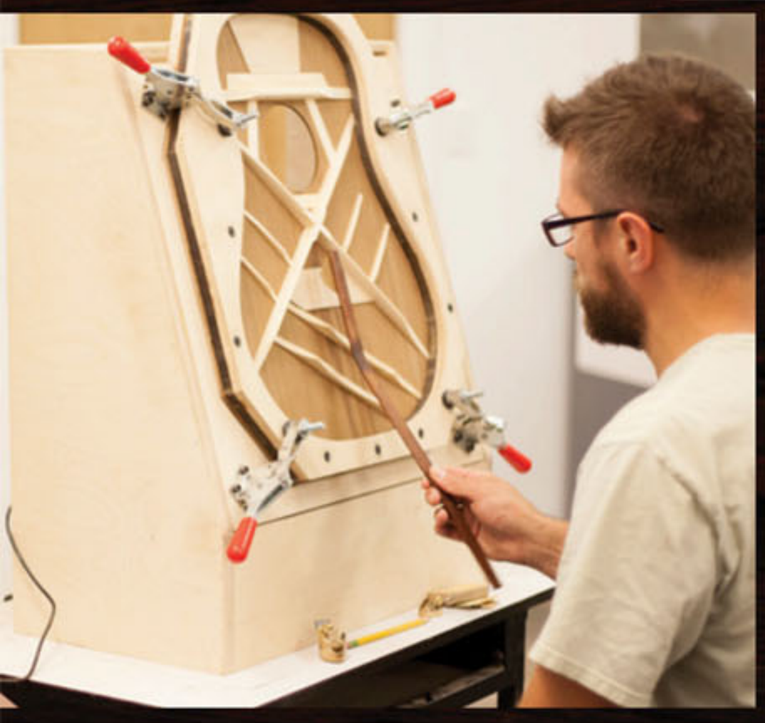

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CMI

"CMI was an offshoot brand made by Marshall, similar to Park, Narb, and Big M. Marshall only made CMI amps between 1976 and 1977, and they are very rare. Although the cabinet looks very different than a Marshall, the CMI Lead and Bass 100 is very much a Marshall inside."

Gibson CUSTOM

photo courtesy of Neil Zlozower

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"Vamp, which later became known as VamPower, was started by Dave Roffey while he worked for Triumph Electronics, which also built amps for Vox, Jennings, and Sound City. VamPower cabinets were made by the same company that made Hiwatt cabinets. The company lasted less than five years, between 1968 and 1973, and they only made about 250 amps. VamPower is probably best known as the stack seen on the cover of T. Rex's *Electric Warrior* album."

VamPower

- VamPower Professional 100 MKIII head, two 4x12 cabinets with Celestion G12H 30-watt greenbacks

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"JoÃ Dallas was a general-purpose musical instrument supplier who made a lot of different musical equipment–drums, horns, reeds, and more. I think that most Dallas amps from the late Fifties and early Sixties were made by other companies like Selmer and Watkins. It was very common for various companies to build things for each other and put different names on their products. The styling of these early Dallas amps is brilliant."

Dallas

- (left to right) Dallas Rangemaster, Dallas "30", Dallas Scala

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6 Thirty-Fifty head (rare, made in Japan)
7 Prototype L100 head (very early, no markings)
8 Early (first-generation logo) 4x12, 50-watt cast-frame Fane 122-149 speakers
9 L100 head
10 200 Plus head (four KT88 tubes)
11 Second-generation 4x12 cabinet, 50-watt cast-frame Fane 122-149 speakers
12 Pro Artiste 30 combo with two 12-inch CTS speakers

Sound City

"Sound City was born when Dallas merged with Arbiter Electronics, which owned Sound City music shops in London. Sound City's design engineer, Dave Reeves, developed the L100 model for them. Pete Townshend played Sound City amps for a while, but a lot of people don't know that Jimi Hendrix also played Sound City amps in 1967 both onstage and to record *Axis: Bold as Love*."

Joe Bonamassa

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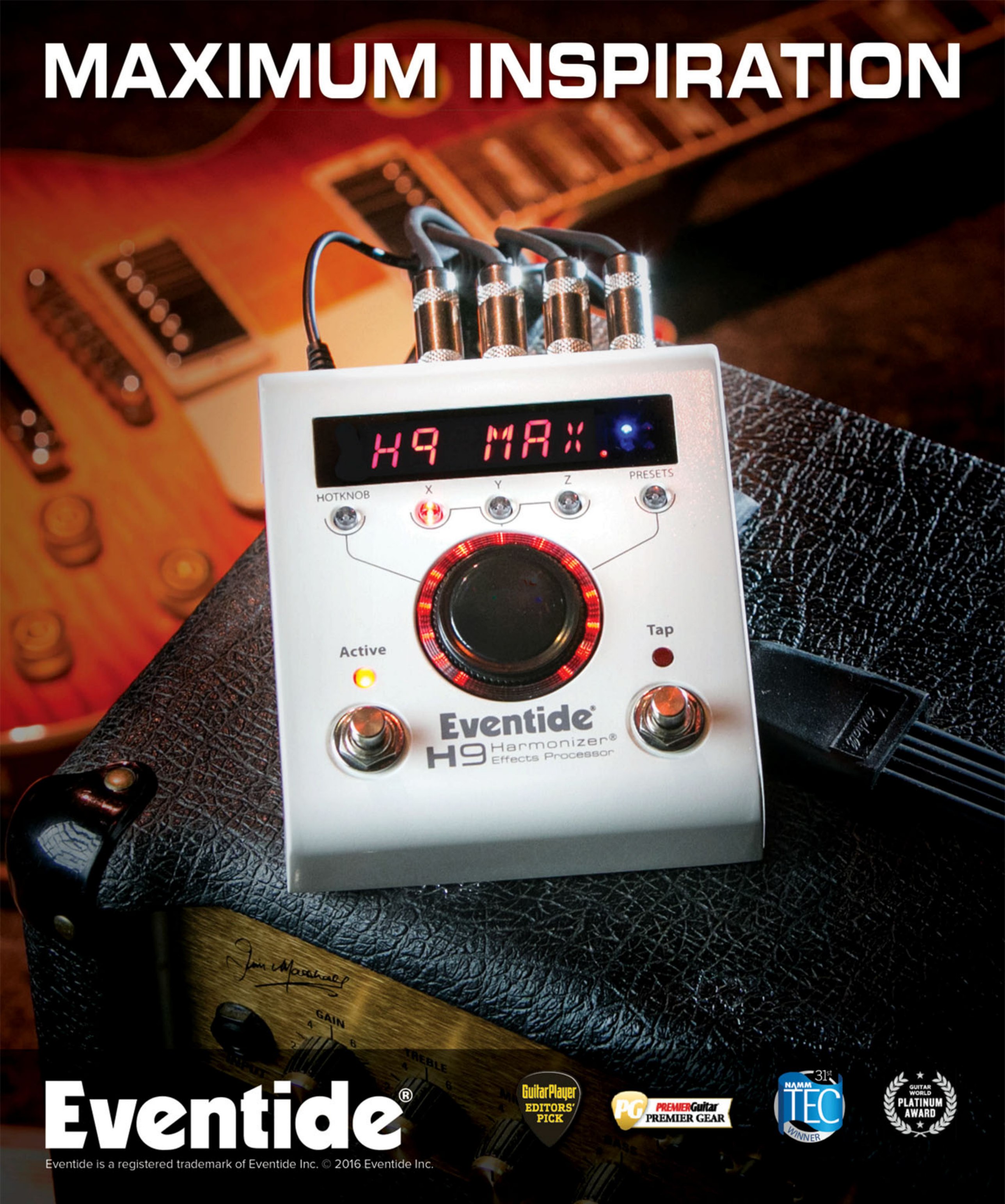

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5 DR-103 100-watt head
6 SE-4123 4x12 cabinet with cast-frame Fane 50-watt model 122

"Dave Reeves left Sound City to start his own company, Hiwatt. I have early Sound City L100s that look identical to Hiwatts. They're solidly built, and their sound is substantial, especially for playing rhythm guitar. It's probable that when Dave Reeves started Hiwatt, Pete Townshend followed along because he loved his Sound City amps."

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"Impact was a company that was later absorbed by Dallas-Arbiter. The latter production 'Impact by Status' models were basically Sound City amps. The layout is exactly the same as the Sound City 50. The inputs and pilot light are in the same place, and it has the same tone stack. The angular styling was completely unique, though."

Impact

- Impact by Status 1015 60-watt head, two 4x12 cabinets with 40-watt cast-frame Fanes

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Dave Hill's Wonderful Life of Comedian/Author, Dave Hill

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AND LOTS AND LOTS OF GUITARS MAY SEEM

LIKE DISPARATE THINGS, BUT THEY'RE ALL PART OF THE

BY MAC RANDALL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAYON RICHARDS
PAGE 66 • GUITAR AFICIONADO

(from top) Pawar Privateer, Dean Razorbolt, 1978 Ibanez Iceman, 2004 Gretsch White Falcon

Seven years ago, comedian Dave Hill decided to challenge himself. Doing standup in clubs and theaters around the world was getting old. It was time to take his act somewhere a little more unusual. Okay, a *lot* more unusual: the Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York.

"A comedian hadn't performed there since Moms Mabley in the late Sixties, and I was warned that the inmates can really intimidate people. If they don't like your show, they'll make you end it," Hill recounts over a cup of coffee and a plate of chocolate chip cookies in the living room of his cozy, whimsically decorated Greenwich Village apartment, which takes up the third floor of a 19th-century brownstone and was once the residence of James Osterberg, a.k.a. Iggy Pop. "Because my comedy's not exactly broad—I guess you'd call it 'alternative'—it seemed like the worst possible environment I could put myself in. But I wanted to try it, so I thought, what does every man in the world—even a violent felon—respect? Guitar solos."

And so, when the time came to head for the big house, Hill brought along one small part of a guitar collection that numbers about two dozen: his 2007 Gibson Firebird with flame maple wings, signed by the Allman Brothers' Warren Haynes (the signature was the product of a chance airport meeting on the way back from the 2009 Bonnaroo festival). Before saying a word, he plugged in, turned up, and launched into "Eruption" by Van Halen. "I was scared shitless," he says, "but it worked. The guards were saying to each other, 'They respect him.' And then I talked for an hour and a half, and *they let me do it*. The guitar playing bridged the gap."

Hill—who appears regularly on *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, *Inside Amy Schumer*, Comedy Central's *@ midnight*, and the public radio program *This American Life*—upped the personal challenge a few years later when he visited a prison in Saltillo, Mexico, that was essentially run by a crime cartel. "They'd murdered the warden," he explains, "and the Mexican government said, 'Okay, looks like you guys got this one, we'll just keep our guards on the outside.' It was like Thunderdome. I thought, well, I had a great time at Sing Sing, and this sounds way crazier!" Once again, Hill's guitar prowess served him in good stead…but you can read more about that in his hilarious new book of autobiographical essays, *Dave Hill Doesn't Live Here Anymore*.

All of this illustrates that well before Hill was a comedian or a writer, he was a guitar player. And not just for laughs, either. The alt-rock bands he's toiled with over the years include Sons of Elvis, whose "Formaldehyde"

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(left, from top): 2007 Gibson Firebird, 1938 Gibson Mastertone Special, 2011 Gibson '56 VOS Goldtop Les Paul, Squier J Mascis Jazzmaster; (right) Hill with Rick Kelly Custom (upper left) and another Iceman (upper right)

got decent exposure on MTV in the mid Nineties, and the critically acclaimed Cobra Verde (for whom he played bass). It was only after he moved to New York from his native Cleveland in 2003 that his talents as a humorist came to the fore.

"I got into comedy because of music," Hill says. "I formed a band called Uptown Sinclair, and I was reluctant about being the singer, but I did it, and then I found that I really enjoyed talking onstage in between songs. If someone broke a string or an amp blew up, I'd be like, 'Cool, I can talk for five minutes.' That part became as fun to me as playing."

Eventually, Hill was invited to do a standup set at the Parkside Lounge on Manhattan's Lower East Side, during which he read semi-randomly from entries in his journal. "Within a year and a half of that night," he says with a level of bemusement that suggests he's still processing it all, "I was filming my own TV show [The King of Miami]. This whole thing just grew, and it was because I had no expectations. The way I saw it was, 'I'll make you the best spaghetti I can, but ultimately I don't give a shit because I'm not in the spaghetti business.' I basically felt zero pressure to accomplish anything, and that freed me up."

Hill maintains the same attitude about music, much to his benefit. Even though comedy has become his career, he keeps getting interesting musical opportunities, both on his own and with Valley Lodge, the power-pop band he currently leads—and which he confesses he formed for the express purpose of touring Japan some day. Not only has such a tour in fact taken place but the experience also inspired him to write the song "Go," which has since become the main theme of HBO's *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. "I love John, and I hope his show stays on for 30 years," Hill says. "Not only because he's a great guy, but because I'll keep getting royalties."

Over the years, Hill acknowledges, "my reasons for playing have changed. As a kid, I just wanted to rock. But now, with all the writing I do, I spend so much time up my own ass that I need something to get me outside of myself. I pick up a guitar and play 'Crazy Train,' and it's 'Crazy Train' no matter what. There's nothing subjective about it, the circle's already complete. Which is why, as my other career grows, music has become more important to me."

So has guitar collecting, a bug that bit Hill many years ago and is now being helped along by some master manufacturers. "Every guitar in my collection has something weird about it," he says, and that's certainly true—in a wonderful way—of the Telecaster-style electric built for him two years ago by Rick Kelly, a luthier based at New York's Carmine Street Guitars. Kelly specializes in using salvaged woods, and this particular model is sourced from two New York City landmarks: The neck was once part of a roof beam at the Chelsea Hotel (where Hill briefly stayed in his early Manhattanite days), and the body had a previous life as a table in the Greenwich Village pub Chumley's, famous for its Prohibition-era secret entrance.

"The neck on this is like a baseball bat," Hill says as he picks the Kelly up and strums a super-resonant A chord. "Fattest neck I've ever played, and it doesn't have a truss rod. At first, you pick it up and go, 'Holy shit, I don't know if I can play this.' But after a few minutes, you love it."

Another notable custom instrument in Hill's collection is a Pawar Privateer. Built last year by Cleveland luthier Jay Pawar, it's a Tele/Rickenbacker hybrid with chambered body, Fralin pickups, and a striking purple finish. "This may be the best guitar I own," he says. "I saw an illustration in the *New York Times*—I don't even remember what the story was about—but the purple color in that illustration looked so cool that I pulled it off the website and sent a swatch to Jay, telling him, '*This* is the color.' It's a tricky shade to get right, because if it goes too purple, it would look kinda cheeseball, but I think he nailed it."

Next to the Pawar is another Tele-style axe: a blue LsL T-Bone with *Pamela Lee* stickered on the neck plate. Whether it's referring to *the* Pamela Lee—née Anderson—is uncertain. Just down the hall in Hill's bedroom and a connected office are, among others, a 1938 Gibson Mastertone Special lap steel ("Best-sounding pickups ever," he says), a 2004 Gretsch White Falcon ("This is what you want to play on TV"), a garish Dean Razorbolt ("I was drunk when I bought it"), a Gibson Custom Shop '56 VOS Goldtop Les Paul from 2011, a 1979 tobacco burst Flying V, and two guitars hand-decorated by Hill himself: a Squier J Mascis Jazzmaster with a swirly psychedelic paint job and a 1978 Ibanez Iceman bedecked with a tapestry of rhinestones, à la Paul Stanley. "I like completely destroying an instrument's resale value," he quips.

Perhaps the most unusual guitar in a collection full of oddities is a 20-year-old Yamaha FG-4415 acoustic signed by two disparate individuals: legendary metal singer Ronnie James Dio and *This American Life* host Ira Glass. "Dio signed it first," Hill says. "He'd been a guest on a radio show I did for a while in L.A. Then one day, I showed the guitar to Ira, and he didn't know who Dio was. I said, 'You're one of the smartest guys in the world and you don't know *that*?' So I made him sign the guitar as well. It's the only thing in existence that's been signed by those two men, and it's a perfect match. Black Sabbath on one side, NPR on the other. It's like the yin and yang of popular culture." Hill pauses and grins. "That pretty much sums me up too." GA

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WHEN IT CAME TO PICKUPS, GRETSCH WENT THEIR OWN WAY.

{ *BY FLIP SCIPIO* }

SOMETIME IN 1954, Ray Butts, an accordion player with a keen interest in electronics, wired two pickup coils in series and out of phase and created a hum-canceling guitar pickup. Mr. Butts started making his pickups, like the ones you see here, by hand. These were custom made to replace a set of Paul Bigsby–made height-adjustable single-coil pickups and fit into the Bigsby's aluminum pickup surrounds.

Through the creation of his now-famous EchoSonic amplifier with built-in tape delay, Mr. Butts had gotten to know Chet Atkins, who in 1954 had started to play his own Gretsch signature-model 6120 Chet Atkins guitar. Besides producing a noticeable 60-cycle hum, the DeArmond Dynasonic single-coil pickups on the 6120 proved to be too bass heavy for Chet's style of playing, in which he used his fingers and a thumb pick. Mr. Atkins suggested the Ray Butts–made humbucking pickups to Gretsch, and Gretsch gave the pickup its Filter'Tron name. Gretsch and Gibson's humbucking pickups, designed by Seth Lover, both made their official commercial debut in 1957, although Atkins performed in public with guitars equipped with Butts' humbucker prototypes in 1956.

When Gretsch formally introduced Mr. Butts's Filter'Tron pickups, the company continued its curious habit of mounting the pickups directly to the body without any form of height adjustment, sharply separating itself from the more user-friendly competition, who gave their customers the option of adjusting the balance between the pickups by turning a few screws. The original Dynasonic pickups consisted of a plastic coil with six cylindrical magnets and six corresponding screws that raised or lowered the individual magnets. The adjustment was intended to control response between the wound and unwound strings, but as the Gretsch pickups were immovable objects, the magnets were often raised to increase the output. This wasn't, and still isn't, a good idea, because if the magnet protrudes too far out of the coil, the pickup sounds noticeably thinner. On the other hand, if the Dynasonic was too close to the strings, the enormously strong magnets would pull the string out of its normal elliptical orbit, with equally bad results. By attaching the Filter'Tron pickup (and its often unfairly lambasted little brother the HiLo'Tron) directly to the top without the possibility of height adjustment, the quality of the pickup's response was totally dependent on the pitch of the neck.

To improve this sad situation, one begins by loosening the pickup surrounds, which are brittle plastic and tend to crack when the screws are retightened. Next, the pickups are carefully removed in order to raise or lower them, depending on the particular guitar's neck pitch and bridge height. Lowering the pickup necessitates removing or lowering the pickup riser or, if no riser is present, removing wood beneath the pickup. Raising the pickup involves carefully inserting small soft-wood shims under the pickup.

The ideal volume difference between two Gretsch pickups on a guitar depends on the preference of the player and can be established only by carefully and patiently adjusting and readjusting each pickup until the desired balance between them is achieved. Some players want the bridge pickup to be the dominant voice on the guitar, while others like the neck pickup to be equal to the bridge pickup in output.

It could be said that classic Gretsch guitars were their own banana peel, since their spectacular looks often belied their limited playability. The quality of these guitars often varied dramatically within the same period, unlike Fender or Gibson, whose decline in quality is much easier to pinpoint and explain. By the time we got our eager hands on one of those eye-popping Gretsch guitars, we often had to admit that they were hard to play, difficult to keep in tune, and decidedly eccentric in their choice and positioning of hardware and controls.

"But what is better than a well set-up Gretsch lovingly sprinkled with DeArmond Dynasonic pickups, an aluminum nut, and a Bigsby?" asked Duane Eddy, Cliff Gallup, Mary Osborne, and Sal Salvador.

"Another Gretsch with Filter'Tron pickups," answered Chet Atkins, Stephen Stills, Randy Bachman, and Brian Setzer in unison. GA

PHOTO COURTESY OF FLIP SCIPIO

New York guitar repairperson Flip Scipio recommends Crazy Legs *by Jeff Beck and the Big Town Playboys to get an earful of Beck's Gretsch Duo Jet with DeArmond Dynasonic pickups.*

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Appreciating Sauternes

BORDEAUX'S OTHER WHITE WINE

{ BY CHRIS GILL, CWAS }

USUALLY WHEN THE topic of discussion is Bordeaux, the focus is almost exclusively on the dry red wines produced in that region. The dry white wines of Bordeaux, usually made from either 100 percent Sauvignon Blanc or a blend of Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc, don't generate much attention or praise, even though many Bordeaux Blanc wines are quite good and nowhere nearly as overpriced as their red counterparts.

However, arguably the most fascinating wines that come out of the entire Bordeaux region—the sweet white wines of Sauternes—have become increasingly overlooked as the hype for certain acclaimed vintages of red Bordeaux wines have pushed prices for many desirable red Bordeaux wines into the stratosphere. While several recent vintages of red Bordeaux have been underwhelming (2011, 2012, and 2013), 2011 and 2013 were better-than-average vintages for Sauternes. And while 2009 was a banner vintage throughout most of the Bordeaux region, the prices of 2009 Sauternes wines stayed relatively sane while the prices of many red Bordeaux wines tripled or quadrupled.

Part of the reason why Sauternes wines are ignored is because sweet wines with high levels of alcohol have fallen out of fashion. It's a pity, because many Sauternes wines are great food companions. The pairing of Sauternes and foie gras is one of the all-time culinary classics, but Sauternes also goes well with salty, rich, or spicy foods—it isn't just for dessert (and if consumed for dessert it should be enjoyed on its own, not to add further layers of sweetness to a sugary dessert dish).

Fortunately, dedication to producing fine Sauternes wines is still going strong in the five communes of the Bordeaux region that produce the wine: Barsac, Bommes, Fargues, Preignac, and Sauternes. However, there are fewer than 200 producers of Sauternes wine, and most of them grow less than five hectares of grape vines, so production is limited.

Part of the reason why the production is so low is that the process of making Sauternes is extremely labor intensive and requires meticulous attention to detail and growing conditions. Sauternes is made from Semillon, Sauvignon, and/or Muscadelle grapes affected by botrytis cinerea, also known as noble rot, which under the right conditions will concentrate the sugar, dehydrate the water content, and intensify desirable flavors in the grapes. Low yields are also key to the development of botrytis, so growers will severely prune vines to achieve ideal conditions. When ready, the grapes are gathered by individual berries or in small clusters in dozens of passes over harvesting periods often lasting several weeks.

As a result, Sauternes is the most expensive wine to produce in the Bordeaux region. But the elevated production costs do not mean elevated retail prices, as all First Growth Sauternes wines cost significantly less than dry red Bordeaux First Growths, with the highly esteemed 2009 Château d'Yquem Sauternes selling for an average of $150 to $900 less than 2009 Mouton Rothschild and 2009 Château Latour, respectively.

Recently, winemakers from various parts of the world have come very close to making dry red wines that taste remarkably similar to fine Bordeaux reds. However, there is nothing that comes even close to the distinctive, complex flavors of a great Sauternes. Château d'Yquem truly occupies its own place in the pantheon of the world's greatest wines (and it should be a bucket list wine for any serious wine enthusiast), but similar thrills can be experienced from Château Climens, Château Rieussec, Château Suduiraut, and other Sauternes First Growth wines for surprisingly down-to-earth prices. For example, I recently purchased 2010 Rieussec for $40 (750ml bottle) from the same retailer that sold me a bottle of 1989 Rieussec back in the mid Nineties for $28. Compare that to the newly released vintages of Cos D'Estournel that I was buying for $20 to $25 back then when today's latest vintages are selling for $100 to $350.

Second labels like Cypres de Climens and Carmes de Rieussec offer even greater bang for the buck. The lighter profile of these wines make them ideal for consumption when young and food pairings. Cypres de Climens and oysters is a favorite indulgence that doesn't break my budget. The honey, almond, citrus, and tropical fruit flavors of the Cypres blended with the briny, mineral funk of Northern Pacific oysters is almost as ethereal a pairing as d'Yquem with foie gras. GA

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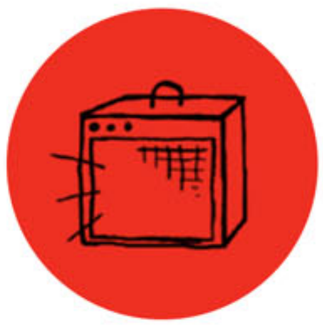

Boutique Chic

WHY A NEW AMP MAY BE A BETTER CHOICE THAN VINTAGE.

{ *BY MITCH COLBY* }

FOR THE PAST few years, I've written exclusively about old amps in this column. I'm just an old guy who has been around amps for a long time, but the subject is still interesting to me (and I hope to you as well). But after a couple of years of vintage amp talk, it's finally time for me to discuss new alternatives. Since I prefer quality, that leads us to the boutique arena.

I know that several major manufacturers are making great amps these days. I'm not familiar with all of the amps available, like I used to be, but I do know that the new Vox amps sound great and are made well, EVH amps are great if you want an affordably priced high-gain amp, and the Fender Hot Rod, which provides a lot of value for your money, may be the best-selling tube amp of all time.

But boutique amps are the best of the best for a number of reasons. Usually these amps are hand made, one at a time, by one or maybe two people. A lot of love and attention to detail go into boutique amps, whether they are copies of old designs or some new variation that does this or that a little differently. When dealing with a small company, you might have a direct relationship with the builder of your amp, who might be willing to make changes to the design to personalize the amp for your taste or playing style. Typically, boutique amps are simpler to maintain as they are built the old way, with parts that are easy to acquire and swap out if they fail.

Today, we are in the midst of an amp renaissance. Dozens of small, independent amp builders make great products, and there are numerous resources for getting the parts needed to make a great amp. At least four manufacturers in the U.S. alone specialize in guitar amp transformers, and there are many quality sources for chassis, resistors, capacitors, tube sockets, and other small parts. There are even multiple sources of tubes! When tube manufacturers started selling their equipment to Asia and Eastern Europe 40 years ago and manufacturers of equipment that used tubes switched to solid-state, very few people thought that anybody would still be making tubes by 2016. Yet today there are multiple suppliers of just about every tube you might use in a guitar amp.

Unfortunately, there are a few downsides to the boutique amp business as well. Some builders have been known to take years to deliver amp orders. In the worst case, some have gone out of business and vanished along with thousands of dollars of deposits. Fortunately, these extreme cases are the exception, not the rule. By doing a little online research, you can easily find out who is reliable.

Another downside is that when you need service on your boutique amp, most small manufacturers do not have the large service center networks that the big companies have. Instead of relying on a local tech, you may need to send the amp back to the manufacturer and wait a much longer time until it's up and running again. Some boutique amp builders have formed networks with other builders and techs to provide authorized service for their amps, but this is something you should confirm before you buy if convenient service is important to you.

Many boutique amps typically cost as much as a collectible vintage amp, so which is the better choice? That is a tough question to answer. If you go vintage, there is a good chance that the amp will need some sort of work and servicing done again and again. Tube sockets get dirty, capacitors leak, resistors drift and get noisy, and on and on. Even if the amp was recently serviced by a competent tech, there's still no guarantee that something won't go wrong. With a new boutique amp that's built well you can assume that, unless a tube craps out, the amp will work for decades without issues.

Another consideration is the resale value. A vintage amp will most likely hold its value or even go up in value in the future. In fact, in recent years vintage amp prices have increased while vintage guitar prices have mostly remained stagnant. In comparison, the resale value of a boutique amp will depend on the reputation of the builder. If a builder has a long waiting list, resale prices tend to be stable. If the builder is a relatively unknown cult figure, finding another buyer can take a while. Further complicating matters is the fact that nobody knows what will happen down the road, so prices for vintage and boutique amps alike could drop. The best approach is to choose whatever makes you the happiest as a player and customer today. GA

Mitch Colby *helped develop many Marshall and Vox amp designs and is the founder of Colby Amplifications*

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Collings I-35 Deluxe

BY CHRIS GILL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

NO MATTER HOW many guitars you may have in your collection, if you don't have a thinline semihollow electric you don't have enough. Hands down, it's one of the most versatile electric guitars ever made, combining the best attributes of a solidbody and an archtop while providing its own unique character and voice. I frequently recommend semihollow guitars to anyone looking for their first electric, mainly for the design's versatility but also for the incredibly enjoyable experience of playing one.

Even if you already own a semihollow guitar or two, I'm going to go one step further and recommend getting a Collings I-35 Deluxe. While the I-35 Deluxe is not a radical departure from the semihollow models most of us know and love, Collings has refined the semihollow design to a new level of sophistication. The most notable difference is that the I-35 Deluxe's body is made entirely from solid tonewoods instead of laminates, which gives the model more dynamic responsiveness, enhanced harmonic complexity, and fatter acoustic-like tone. In some ways the I-35 Deluxe leans a little closer to full-body archtop sound, but at the same time its attack and definition still have the aggressive bark and bite of a desirable solidbody.

Consistent with Collings' reputation and the model's "Deluxe" moniker, the materials used throughout the I-35 Deluxe's construction are top quality. The body features a highly figured maple top and mahogany back and sides, while the neck consists of a single piece of premium mahogany attached to a maple center block via a generously long mortise-and-tenon neck joint. The neck's Madagascar rosewood fingerboard has tight grain and is available with mother-of-pearl dot inlays or optional double-parallelogram inlays. This model's "Deluxe" designation tecÚically comes into play with the ivoroid binding surrounding the headstock and fingerboard (in addition to the top and back binding found on other I-35 models) as well as the ivoroid truss-rod cover, top-hat control knobs, and pickup surrounds, which are custom made by Collings.

The neck has a medium-fat C-shaped profile and 12-inch radius to provide a classic, familiar feel and playability, but at 24 7/8 inches the scale length is just a tad longer to provide slightly more string tension, which makes the bass strings more punchy and the treble strings more sparkly. Collings ships the I-35 Deluxe with .011–.049 strings, which also increases tension to drive the top harder, increase resonance, and enhance dynamic punch. The neck has 22 medium profile 18-percent nickel-silver frets that are smoothly polished and rounded to provide effortless playability. Other features include ivoroid tuning buttons for the Gotoh SG301 1:18 tuners and a nickel-plated TonePros AVR-II bridge and stop tailpiece. The high-gloss nitrocellulose lacquer finish is applied with a delicate touch to preserve the wood's inherent tonality and dynamic response.

I particularly enjoyed the tone of the guitar's Lollar low-wind Imperial humbuckers, which provide crisp, shimmering clean tones but fatten up considerably without getting overly dark when played with a generous amount of overdrive. Controls consist of individual volume and tone knobs for each pickup and a three-position pickup selector toggle. Jupiter Yellow Vintage Tone capacitors deliver horn-like "woman tone" midrange when the tone controls are backed all the way off, with just enough treble to cut through the mix.

With its all-solid wood construction, the Collings I-35 Deluxe offers a playing experience that isn't radically different from the traditional semihollow designs we all know and love, but rather it elevates the tone to a new level of dynamic responsiveness and sonic sophistication. Thanks to Collings' immaculate craftsmanship and attention to detail, the model also elevates the feel and playability of this classic design. Whether you're looking for a first semihollow guitar or you want to play the best example of this versatile icon, the Collings I-35 Deluxe is highly recommended. GA

LIST PRICE: $6,350 (as shown)
Collings Guitars, collingsguitars.com

TRUE COLLINGS Alex Rueb of Collings reveals the Deluxe details.

Why did Collings make its own parts like the custom ivoroid knobs and pickup surrounds for this series instead of using readily available parts made elsewhere?
We saw the grained-ivoroid trim as an opportunity to put our own spin on things and also to tie the elements of the guitar together in a visually cohesive way. These components are very labor intensive to make in-house, but they definitely give the guitars a unique and recognizable aesthetic that isn't available anywhere else on the market.

What differences do the all-solid materials make compared to the typical laminated materials used for most semihollow electric models?
The solid-wood construction enhances the acoustic response of the guitar, which translates to a clear and somewhat brighter overall sound, with increased overtone activity and harmonic detail. The pick attack is quite fast and articulate, and the dynamic range is highly nuanced. Our laminate-construction guitars [*LC series*] have a warm and more mid-forward sound. The tonal complexion is relatively dry compared to the harmonically rich solid-wood series, and laminate guitars have a softer attack with a natural bloom that follows each articulation.

Why does Collings recommend using .011–.049 gauge strings with this model instead of arguably more popular lighter gauges?
Considering that most of our guitars have a 24 7/8-inch scale length, we find that 11s provide the right amount of tension to drive the guitar and bring out the resonance of the wood. We also put a lot of care and attention into our setup and fretwork, which helps to alleviate any playability issues that some might associate with heavier gauges

New Power Generation

2016 Chevrolet Corvette Z06 Convertible

BY MIKE DALY

(top) The optional 15.5-inch ceramic Brembo brakes help keep flirtations with disaster brief. (bottom) The well-appointed Z06 can even serve as your daily driver.

UNLESS YOU'RE A diehard automotive historian or a vintage Corvette enthusiast, you've probably never heard of the late Zora Arkus-Duntov. Zora didn't invent the Vette, but he was the guy GM assigned to breathe life into the nascent six-cylinder model when, after only a year on the market, its sales paled in the face of Ford's new eight-cylinder Thunderbird. Duntov responded with his characteristic affinity for racing and hot-rod culture by first endowing the Corvette with a V-8 and later adding disc brakes, four-wheel independent suspension, and fuel injection. He also directly defied Detroit's cooperative ban on sanctioned racing when, in 1963, he approved a new optional competition package for the first-ever Sting Ray Corvette, a "Special Performance Equipment" group internally coded as Z06.

Official nomenclature for one year only, the Z06 option disappeared for decades until Chevy dredged it up in 2001 as a high-performance variant of the fifth-generation Corvette. It has mostly been available ever since, despite a brief absence during the 2014 launch year of the current seventh-gen Vette. We were lucky enough to try out the 2016 Corvette Z06 convertible during a week of slap-happy testing through the rugged byways and ocean vistas surrounding Los Angeles, and, to put it mildly, it's hard to believe a car so muscular once lacked true performance credibility.

Chevy claims the new Z06 is the most powerful production car ever made by GM and one of the most powerful American cars made today, period. Without a doubt, our test car's unyielding ferocity did nothing to dispel this notion. With 650 horsepower and 650 pound-feet of torque on tap (a stat that's proudly advertised on a dashboard console placard), the latest Z06 is nothing short of a rocket engine on wheels in the bold tradition of stateside muscle cars. To be fair, this Vette has its share of traction control systems, governing computers, and advanced suspension elements. It also skips, chirps, and giddily fishtails out of control with indiscreet first-gear accelerator stomps, overly aggressive passing moves, and other routine behaviors of the average alpha-male driver.

Eschewing the base-level 2016 Corvette Stingray's LT1 motor, the Z06 is equipped with the LT4 engine, a supercharged direct-injection V-8 with racing components, like an aluminum block and cylinder heads, titanium valves, forged-steel connecting rods, forged-aluminum pistons, stainless-steel exhaust manifolds, and a dry-sump lubrication system. It reportedly delivers 37 percent more hp and 40 percent more torque than the LT1, despite displacing an identical 6,162 cubic centimeters. A serious exercise in racing tech, the LT4 takes the Z06 from zero to 60 mph in as little as 3.3 seconds, with an estimated top speed of 185 mph. It's the kind of engine that makes the entire car literally shake to life upon cold starts.

With our test car finished in Torch Red paint, I was loath to explore such possibilities within easy glimpse of law enforcement, but in the remote canyons of the Big Tujunga Creek I comfortably pushed the Z06 from 60 mph to well above the century mark with casual jabs of the floor-mounted accelerator, seemingly getting there in the span of about 40 yards and the blink of an eye. Our test car was optioned with 15.5-inch ceramic-matrix Brembos that brought the Z06 back to within legal speeds in gut-punching nature, keeping my flirtations with disaster brief and only harrowing in concept.

The LT4's ridiculous torque output is nearly kept in check by laughably huge Michelin Super Sport tires that are 335mm wide (13.2

inches) at the rear. As a basis of comparison, these tires are nearly twice as wide as the optional 7 1/2–inch Campagnolo wheels that once made the 1970's "Chairs & Flares" Ferrari Dinos seem so adventurous.

The ceramic brakes are included in an optional Z07 package that quickens zero-to-60 times to a brisk 2.95 seconds. This equipment grouping basically echoes the specifications of the C7R racecars that have been dominating this year's IMSA sports car GTLM class, having taken first and second place at the 24 Hours of Daytona and first place at the 12 Hours of Sebring.

Though a seven-speed manual transmission comes standard on the Z06, our tester was outfitted with an eight-speed paddle-shift gearbox that proved quite able, with computer algorithms largely mimicking the behavior of a true dual-clutch tranny. The shift times are particularly quick on wide-open upshifts, and Chevy claims they even exceed the capabilities of a Porsche 911 PDK gearbox in such circumstances.

Obviously as much a track car that's comfortable on the street as vice versa, the Z06 is replete with several performance modes with varying degrees of traction intervention as well as a host of metrics that can be viewed in the central digital instrument readout (which lies between two analog needled gauges). The bells and whistles include two g-force meters, a zero–60-mph timer, and a performance recorder developed with Cosworth that stores data and video footage of hot laps on a removable SD card in the glove compartment.

Our well-appointed tester also made a case that the Z06 can function as a daily driver, with amenities like power heated/cooled seats, power windows, dual-climate control, heads-up display, and back-up camera. But with stiff lightweight sport seats positioned nearly over the rear axle and the engine compartment's huge expanse unyieldingly staring you in the face, there's no mistaking this car's design brief.

The obvious takeaways from the Z06 convertible are its raw, visceral performance and exotic exterior, both of which are just as evident at first glance as they are after extended drive time. Sculpted floor sills, carbon fiber chin spoilers, split rear aero foils, and cooling ducts on nearly every panel in sight scream supercar credibility. Chevy used to dream the Vette might one day convincingly compete with a Ferrari, visually or performance-wise. That day seems to have finally arrived, and at a fraction of the price, no less. Zora would be proud. CA

MSRP: Base, $83,400; as tested, $110,850
Chevrolet, chevrolet.com

California Vibes

Echopark Vibramatic 4T5 Head

BY PAUL RIARIO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

NESTLED BETWEEN eclectic Silver Lake and colorful Chinatown, Los Angeles's Echo Park community is affectionately nicknamed the "Williamsburg of the West Coast." With its influx of tattooed hipsters, trendy bars, appetizing eateries, and coffeehouses, Echo Park can seem unapologetically hip and quietly cool. It's also home to Echopark Guitars, whose company's name is adopted from this diverse neighborhood. It's here that premier luthier Gabriel Currie has been crafting some of the most stylish and retro-flavored electric guitars for rock stars like Jackson Browne, Aerosmith's Joe Perry and Brad Whitford, and Queens of the Stone Age's Josh Homme and Troy Van Leeuwen.

Currie has also dabbled in making a one-of-a-kind acoustic, the Grand Auditorium, which *Guitar Aficionado* covered a few issues ago. As if that wasn't enough, he and amp tech Eric Bernstorff have designed several desirable custom amps—"from the cabs to the last capacitor" as Currie puts it. The Echopark Vibramatic head, their latest offering, is a beautiful sonic hodgepodge of Sixties "Brownface" amplifiers, specifically the Pro, Concert, and Bandmaster. While those amps are known for their revered pitch-shifting vibrato circuit, Echopark's classic-inspired Vibramatic delivers so much more.

Combining retro-styled cues from Silvertone and Ampeg amplifiers with Space Age contours, the striking Vibramatic head (with its prominent red knobs) utilizes a 4T5A circuit and Class AB push/pull configuration that dishes out 45 watts of clean power or 65 watts when pushed. The amp is completely hand wired with U.S.-made military-spec components and driven by two 6L6 power tubes, three 12AX7 and two 7025 preamp tubes, and solid-state rectification. The front panel features a single input jack, a voice switch, and controls for gain (master volume), high, mid, low, and presence, as well as rate and depth controls for its tube harmonic vibrato.

There are many things to love about the Vibramatic head, from its modish looks to its gorgeous "Univibe-sounding" vibrato, but its generously plump and well-defined sound is by far its most striking quality. In addition, the head's voicing switch adds versatility, providing headroom when using pedals or pushing the front end for gritty overdrive.

The Vibramatic pairs exceptionally well with any speaker cabinet loaded with Celestion or Eminence speakers. Plugging in a Telecaster and setting the voicing switch in the upward position, I found the amp's full-range clean tones were impressively muscular and could easily deliver a robust and snappy response, almost as if I had an overwound single-coil pickup. Adding a gain pedal further enhanced the Vibramatic's ability to mix spongy overdrive with taut lows, plummy mids, and highs that are as smooth as silk. The built-in vibrato is syrupy-sweet and can be both subtle or in your face, depending on where it's set.

The Vibramatic's nature changed entirely with a humbucker-equipped guitar plugged directly in, the gain control turned up, and the voicing switch pushed down. Here, the amp sounds firmer, with Plexi-like sparkle on the high-end and no low-end muddiness. Increasing the volume introduced more clean-with-bite tones and crackly rich overdrive. It's not often I say I had a blast with an amp, but I found the remarkable Vibramatic to be a force of nature, filled with gutsy power and wide dynamic range. GA

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Goodbye, Stranger

MERLE HAGGARD, 1937–2016

IN 2000, ANTI RECORDS, an independent label better known for its punk rock releases, hired photographer Piper Ferguson to shoot the cover of Merle Haggard's "comeback" album, *If I Could Only Fly*. Ferguson thought she'd wrapped up the photo session until she noticed a swamp on the property in Redding, California, where the shoot took place, owned by the late country icon, who passed away on April 6, 2016—his 79th birthday.

"Everybody was saying 'What a good day,' and high-fiving each other," Ferguson recalls. "We were on our way back to Merle's house to have a drink and some dinner when I saw the swamp. I stopped everybody right there as we were walking up the driveway. I said, 'Wait! I just have to shoot one roll at this swamp.' So I made everybody go back there and got Merle very close to the edge of the water, just standing there with his guitar. That ended up being the cover of the record."

In the photo Haggard is holding a custom Martin S000-45 with his name inlaid on the fingerboard, one of seven guitars in this style that Martin made for him during the late Sixties. He eventually sold or gave away all but one, which he smashed one night in the late Seventies and subsequently had repaired. That is most likely the guitar in the shot. The photo seen here isn't the cover photo but another image from the same swampy setup. In some ways it captures Haggard's maverick personality perhaps even more evocatively.

"I just love the spookiness of the image," Ferguson says. "It looks like a southern swamp in Louisiana or something, but it was Merle's property in Northern California. There's something about the combination of that setting and this scraggly, legendary country icon with the most beautiful voice. It just feels like a quintessential, perfect moment for Merle." —*Alan di Perna*

Signed, limited-edition prints of this photo—and additional images by Piper Ferguson—are available from rockpaperphoto.com.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **PIPER FERGUSON**

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